



# **Cultural Constellations**

## **An International Literary Review**



University of Maryland Global Campus  
Europe 75th Anniversary Edition, 2025



*Eva Pagoulatos*

**Dragons in the Sky**

*Photography*

# Cultural Constellations

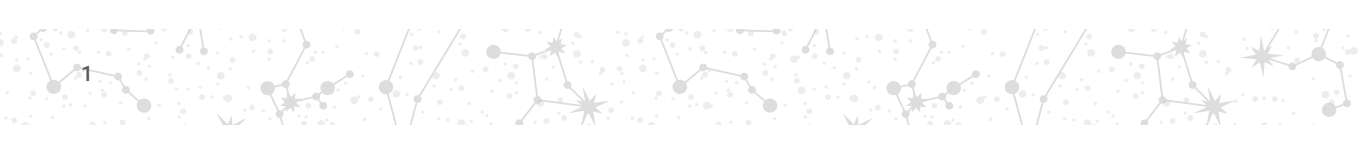
## An International Literary Review



A literary journal founded in celebration of writing and art produced by members of the U.S. military community, Cultural Constellations is an annual publication University of Maryland Global Campus Europe (UMGC Europe). Outside editorial notes, the views voiced on these pages are solely the responsibility of the author and do not reflect views and opinions held by UMGC as an institution nor by personnel associated with this publication.

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## A Note from the Editors

Since we began telling stories, the night sky has served as both a canvas and a chronicle for human creativity. Stars punctuate the darkness, offering brief glimpses of light and meaning. In 2005, when *Constellations* was first published, the editors noted that its name symbolized University of Maryland Global Campus's remarkable growth and bold exploration of new technologies in higher education. Today, technology has accelerated education to a pace that was nearly unimaginable when our journey began in 1947. Embracing its global mission, UMGC connects classrooms across continents and time zones, from Okinawa to Ramstein to Adelphi. An overseas program that began with just seven professors teaching GIs stationed abroad has grown into a constellation of teaching and service locations that meet students where they are.

We have also renamed this collection *Cultural Constellations* to reflect a more expansive understanding of how we create meaning and shape the world. Our aesthetic vision rests on the belief that creative thinking is a form of critical thinking and that studying the humanities cultivates empathy and understanding across cultures, fostering inclusivity. These voices offer fresh insight into how artistic expression connects us, inviting new perspectives on the world. We hope these pages inspire you to think critically, creatively, and compassionately.

Within these pages, you will encounter many voices, including esteemed professors, staff, and students—our guiding stars. From the first, UMGC has placed the well-being and success of our students at the center of everything we do, and we embrace opportunities to help them find their voices and share their stories.

We would like to thank UMGC President Gregory W. Fowler, PhD, as well as Vice President and Director Patricia Coopersmith, UMGC Europe; Associate Vice President and Associate Dean Andrew Boone, PhD, UMGC Europe; and Associate Vice President and Deputy Director Patricia Jameson, DBA, UMGC Europe.

Jessica Stock, PhD  
Judith McNeely, PhD  
Overseas Collegiate Faculty  
and  
Nicola Wentholt  
Academic Affairs Coordinator

## Saudade

*Saudade has no direct English counterpart. It is a word not fully definable for English speakers. It is a sad state of intense longing for someone or something absent. Saudade is often expressed in literature and music: a melancholy yearning, a robust and persistent longing or desire, especially for something unattainable. The following comprises dreams, poems, experiences, and stories people have told me about their lives. It tries to put Saudade into words.*

They met in a star-crossed collision of worlds. It was a moment when life decided to change the rules and catch its victims off guard. The possible seemed out of reach at that collision, but the impossible was real. It was an unbearably magical time, a time when all dreams appeared to be within their grasp. They were never sure how this happened or why it happened. But they were changed into different people because of this star-crossed collision, this ever-so-happy tragic coincidence amid the disorder of the cosmos.

She was not a conformist. She had an argument for everything. She had arrived at this moment both damaged and very strong. She was wit, charm, brilliance, and a touch of vulnerability, all mixed in a beautiful package, as a good god must have intended in its creation. This, her unbearable alchemist's brew of life, drew him in. Her alchemy had the force of a black hole, but the brilliance of powerful and uplifting light. Being with her was a deep drink of bracingly, refreshing life in the tepid stew of mere existence. She was what poets longed for, but never found. When she spoke, the dreams became real, and the real became illusion. And the dreams were often all too real. More real than the most vivid of his mundane inner thoughts. In her vortex, the doubters believed, and the believers became agnostic.

He could never forget that day when she came to him grinning excitedly; she had a plan, as usual. That plan was to leave the sinking ship of their lives and flee to another city. "We will find joy there," she said. "We will find the truth, and we will be free." She brought out a beautifully colored map of this "holy place," as her finger traced that city's sectors; he felt it impossible not to believe. Like a foreboding prick of pain in his brain, her hope became a full blown hemorrhage, and the story grew into a reality. He could see it, taste it, feel it. It was to be their story and would be no one else's. They would live in a flat above a bakery, they would read interesting literature, they would find bohemian jobs, and they would be free.



Supplied with her laughter, wit, beauty, and hope, they cast themselves in a lifeboat and rowed away from the wreckage of their sinking lives. She rejoiced in the journey, and they threw themselves on the new shore, believing in the hope and freedom of the dream. And, for a brief shining moment, they stood watching as the fireworks brought in the new year, the new world, and they were safe! The dream was absolute! In champagne-sated joy, they celebrated life. There was joy, there was peace. There was love.

But all love brings hurt and loss; once a person decides to love, they have set themselves on the path of loss and pain. They can love the girl, the boy, the dream, and the hope, but they are set on a course that will ultimately end, usually with little warning. All things die in this world - no matter how beautiful - they die. So, to not hurt means to have never loved. At each moment, we must decide whether to love or avoid the hurt.

Soon, it was clear that the beautiful girl with the dream needed something else—her dream and her freedom. She wanted to stay and needed to go. Though the illusion was real, for a time, it failed, and no amount of love could save it.

Desperate to keep the dream alive, they read articles about how this dream could work. These articles told them about others who had made their lives work. Those articles said it could be done. But those articles were also an illusion. They were someone else's life, not theirs. Dream killers are impervious to the alchemist's power. The killer of dreams is the kryptonite of creeping time and reality, the magic no longer worked.

He saw this. He let his heart die a little. He could not make the magic work. Her dream had freed them for a time; her dream was his escape. Her dream had become theirs. But it was her dream, and the dream eventually failed. As love died, hearts screamed, agony knew no bounds, and prayers fell dead upon the void. Love longed to fly but had no wings.

What do we do, those of us who follow love into the abyss? What do we do when the magic is not enough? Do we spend our time regretting the damage? Do we flail ourselves upon the shores of our failure and lament how love fled? Do we give ourselves to darkness and wish we had not been born?



We can. But we should, instead, rejoice in the beauty of the moments in which we have bathed in the sun of that love's dream. It is better to remember the warmth of the sunlit street cafes, the Negronis, the smiles, the laughter, and the captured music of the magical moments in time. Better we rejoice in the fact that though love may flee, it never leaves. Even when the dream has passed, we are changed for the better by its beauty. Do not regret the bookshops, the cafes, the smoke, the games of chess, and the quiet, hopeful evenings when the dreams were real. Also, do not regret the loss of those moments when everything was possible, and nothing could fail. Instead, find sweetness in the picture of the lake's quiet shores on a sunny day when life was a storm from Hades, but you were safe on your bench. Do not find regret in that which added so much beauty to your life. Even if for a brief moment. In that moment, you, a hopeless beast, were a companion to beauty and love.

And that must be enough, for time never quits its march toward darkness.

We are told by the poets that Marc Antony stood on his balcony, alone, the night before his death. He looked at the sea of reality colliding upon the shores of his illusion. But he did not lament his impending death, or the loss of Cleopatra. Instead, he heard spectral music and the sound of joy and dancing - his memories. He chose not to regret what life had given him; love, joy, the many happy moments. With Antony in mind, another poet said, go boldly to the window, drink it in. Accept this gift, this joy, this memory of love. The future is not ours to know, but the past is always ours to keep. And if we can take upon ourselves the freedom of the burden of love and loss, then we may be fortunate enough to find a warm fire to sit by when we grow old and full of years. Taking the book that is our heart and memories, we can still dance among the stars with the love that fled and nurture our joy no matter what the darkness brings.



***Metamorphoses 2***

MR. ARTISINAL, THE LYRICAL, UNFORGETTABLE, ARTISTICAL mastermind, scour these lyrics, religiously, through faith and works, sift behind the dirt, a diamond in the rough you might find. Ya conscious constantly wants to be one of thee, one and only. Maybe, keep the faith of a mustard seed, he shall bleed wine to widen up thy own eyes. Well, thankfully, Common, he has shown sight the light.

*FLOWING THROUGH THE PHASES OF LIFE*, Metaphorically I floated through space and time Waiting on a mention, Waging for my pension. Patiently and graciously, I was anxiously aging this sentence, ironically, no admission. Ritzy seemingly committed no crime. See, he acted self-defensively, no perjury. The consensus permitted me to murder these rhymes. These Rappers consciously soullessly in a bind.

*White sparks of my rise*, caused demise, Dying outline, still getting outshined. What a way to die. Despise. Criticize. Keep your idle eyes. Sheep in disguise, I baptize, never idolize. Kneeling in the darkest times, Seeking Christ, it's only God, I confide. My mark left in these lives resides in the verses y'all recite. Don't deny, this is true sight. I emphasize the feelings, that's been denied furthermore, empathize on the of bill lies, you've been burglarized. I sympathize with the cries, lift up, Imma heal and dry. I gift rap and reprise the message, artists lost, scrambled, jumbled, mumbled, Oh, my, my, what A Lot. They crumbled. fumbled, multiple umbleds. CALCULATOR GRAPH-ING to DIVIDE.

**SPLICED**. Dice this joint up for you. Slow it down on you. Released my pent up aggression, from this mental oppression, now I'm about to shell out this lesson. then you'll too, see my point of view. Oof. I know y'all vibing with this one too. Let loose and allow the rhythm to stew Something to reminisce on time to.

Use your intellectual, and let me take you back to ...

School. Test your IQ with a little reading and comprehension, find the reasoning behind Ritzy's composition.

The story's position begins in The European heat, studying philosophies, unique beliefs, and humanities.

Sweatshirt and Adidas on my feet, walking through the Incirlik streets.

To class, I heed.

Professor Magee, challenged me to open up my mind, "explore and see the true capabilities of your creativity."

Not challenging, this was simply the opportunity to showcase my complexity. Though, I'm no Shakespeare, I too create these comedies. While on the surface, perplexing and appearing as a tragedy, within these verses, it's thought provoking. Invoking certain emotions that melodies could only reach. Before writing this harmony, I pieced up a short about duality:  
The Child versus the Mature.  
Questioning the balance between our youthful nature and maturity.

Both too brilliantly and distinct to pick between the other,  
I put them in sync. Sit back, observe and listen.  
Are your ears open? Do I have your attention?  
This selection I tell vehemently,  
about how not expressing the truth of your core breeds malice,  
like in the palace. Sequestering  
your blessing, stressing over your responsibilities,  
nesting depression or hostility, you're unknowingly resulting in Metta,  
not World Peace.

For the actuation of maturation to formulate,  
one must be in touch and encapsulate  
their imagination at its most compelling stage,  
then permeation may take place. Too intricate?  
Okay. Maybe layman's phrase is the key.  
This just ain't rhymes, see?  
I string these metaphors for you to think,  
about how our child's morale needs to be seen, heard,  
for you to be released, then thou shall feel complete.  
A mouthful of similes.  
So many you may need to put this on repeat.

Play this back if you didn't catch what the Metta metaphor is. Final  
stop at the station, not final my destination. This is terminus.  
It's the restitution, my evolution brought the solution.  
While the creation of this revolution might be amusing,  
my talent wasn't meant to put you in the state of bliss. This  
is the heart, for this Art is an expression. A chef's kiss from the last  
lyricist. Not a rapper, a poet.  
This is my METAMORPHOSIS.



**Md Mozaffor Hossain**

***Rituals of Love***

Let me do it my way, for, then, I do it better.  
I love you; I want to love you.  
The rituals they interpret for you chain me.  
They arrest my love for you.

My love grows stronger in freedom, in my way.  
Let me love you as I may.

Must I attend a one-to-one conference with you?  
Need I an office in the first place?  
Aren't you omnipresent?  
But these rituals, I bet, confine you.

Your love is omnipresent, so is my love for you.  
You are omniscient, so my love sees you.  
It reaches you wherever I love you from.  
My soul meets you as my prayers do.

My love moves and flies in blossom.  
It flows smooth in upheavals but these regulations.  
Or a thousand queries pamper me.

Nicole Malyj Daone

## *The Dance*

Korbach Displaced Persons (DP) Camp  
American Zone of Occupied Germany  
October 1945

Nikolas made a poker bet with a single cigarette. He'd noticed Ira looking at his cards four times since they were first dealt, a sure tell that Ira was bluffing and had nothing in his hand worth betting.

Ira shifted on the stiff wooden stool, the joints groaning with his movement. Stalling his next move, Ira asked, "Did you hear about the concert at the schoolhouse tonight?"

"Yes, sure. I heard. They've been setting up since yesterday," Nikolas said. He leaned into the hard edge of the folding table, tamping his impatience.

Ira finally pushed two cigarettes into the betting pile, calling and raising Nikolas' bet. Nikolas casually tossed another cigarette into the pile, calling his friend's bluff without raising the bet any higher. Ira would be bumming his lost cigarettes off Nikolas all night anyway. He figured Ira didn't even have a low pair to best the ace Nikolas held.

"You think the DP camp's Circassian beauty will be there?" Ira asked, laying three cards facedown onto the table to be dealt three new cards before the final round of betting.

Nikolas tried not to blink or swallow loudly. "Who?" He pretended not to know who Ira was talking about. *Of course, she would be there*, Nikolas thought with annoyance. *She never missed an opportunity to socialize.*

"Anna, of course. The petite Ukrainian with the dark, curly hair."

"Oh, her. Well, I would think so. She goes to all the social events," Nikolas replied curtly.

"She and Wasyl broke up again. Why didn't you tell me you punched his lights out a couple of weeks ago? I had to hear it through gossip."

"Slipped my mind."

"Slipped your mind, huh? Yeah ok, Nick," Ira replied with his friend's Americanized name. Ira pressed on, "You think she will wear that red lipstick tonight? Why did you get that for her anyway?" He used an accusing but jesting tone, folding his hand once Nikolas bet another cigarette.





Nikolas was right, Ira was bluffing. And he was also pushing the limits of Nikolas' patience. "She asked me for the lipstick. I got it for her. That's all there is."

"What did she give you for it?" Ira winked, a smirk spreading over his face.

Nikolas shuffled the cards. "Strudel."

"German pastry?" Ira asked incredulously. "Where did she learn to make that? And why didn't you tell her to go out with me as payment instead?" Ira joked, looking with unabashed disappointment at the cards Nikolas had just dealt him.

Nikolas bristled, muttering, "Not sure she's in the market for a new boyfriend. But I can ask her."

"Oh, you're a real pal, Nick. Thanks."

Nikolas bet three cigarettes. Ira called his bet, trying to get Nikolas to make eye contact. Ira wasn't sure why his friend was acting so weird.

"You want to go to the concert tonight? You could ask Anna about me."

Nikolas paused. Licking his lips, he replied, "You know I don't go to those things."

"Why not? The band is traveling all over for poor schmucks like us. It's a whole orchestra. We should go out and give them some support. They were in a ghetto and Auschwitz as prisoners together. They're survivors, like us."

Moderately intrigued, Nikolas raised the bet, saying, "Hm, is that right?"

Nikolas knew he couldn't hide his sadness behind cards and a bottle of vodka forever. He also knew he was unable to avoid Anna forever. He'd begun to miss socializing away from the control and safety he commanded at a card table.

"I suppose I could go for a while," Nikolas conceded.

Ira stood up and slapped his hands on the table. Cards scattered to the floor and he reached for his bets from the last hand. "Let's go have some fun. I'll meet you outside in twenty minutes."

"I'll let you take this last one," Nikolas said as he pushed the cigarettes on the table towards Ira. After Ira left, Nikolas stooped to pick up the cards that had fluttered to the floor, then went to his bedroom to find more suitable clothing for a concert. He shaved with a dull blade and ran a comb through his thinning hair. Nikolas looked at his reflection in the small, cracked oval mirror inside the bedroom he shared with his roommate Danylo.

A glimmer of life reflected back to him for the first time in weeks: his chestnut-colored eyes were clear, his cheeks a healthy pink. Behind each ear he dabbed a drop of cologne, a spoil from a French officer who had lost a bet to Nikolas while visiting the DP camp. He cleaned his teeth and slid into his favorite white long-sleeved shirt. Nikolas' pants were pressed as well as he could from the steam of his bath the day before, and he snapped his suspenders smartly in place. A grey overcoat completed his attire, and Nikolas thought he lacked only the bow tie and fedora hat he'd seen fashionable American men wearing in magazines. For now, this would have to do.

Nikolas met Ira outside. A full moon hung in bright glory above, the precipice of winter upon them. Autumn whispered its final pleas of remembrance in the breeze as curled leaves blew down the path. Acorns and gravel crunched underfoot while the men walked to the schoolhouse.

For the first time at the Korbach DP camp, Nikolas was ready to let loose. He felt the desire to be happy again taking root within him. The two years inside the German labor camps slowly receded into distant memory. Since liberation six months ago, he'd healed from typhus and near starvation. The last month was spent suffocating in grief after learning his wife died and eleven-year-old son Dmytro was gone, disappearing without a trace. He would still find a way to look for Dmytro, even if Nikolas was told it would be impossible to return to Ukraine and no one knew where his son could be. His wife was dead, but Nikolas needed to live again. He must move forward.

The schoolhouse overflowed with people. Nearly everyone from the DP camp showed up for the performance. The weekends inside the schoolhouse were usually filled with singing, dancing, and music from a Gramophone. Live music was played when the rare fiddle, trumpet, or simple percussion instrument could be found. It was special to have an ensemble of men with so many instruments come to play for the camp.

Nikolas was greeted warmly by his friends, American soldiers, and camp administrators as he entered the schoolhouse. With Nikolas' connections, Ira and Nikolas easily carved through the crowd and found a space with a good view of the stage. It was standing room only, and the pallet stage was set up with a drum set, accordion, violin, fiddle, and piano. Nikolas looked around the crowd. He wondered where she was.

He spotted Olga and knew Anna would be nearby. A few moments later, Anna squeezed her way past Nikolas, saying "Excuse me," in Ukrainian, brushing firmly and deliberately against Nikolas' arm. She looked up flirtatiously at him, the red lipstick perfectly showcasing her lips. Nikolas' heart leaped inside his body, and she continued to shimmy her way to her friends. Joining Olga, Anna turned toward Nikolas. Their eyes held each other, and time held still.

Ira missed the exchange between Nikolas and Anna. He was engrossed in conversation with friends and didn't notice Anna as she squeezed by. Anna laughed with Olga and glanced eagerly from the stage to Nikolas. He'd been avoiding her for a couple of weeks, but her gaze communicated that she still wanted him to know she was waiting for him. That she'd always wait for him to come to her.

The room buzzed with anticipation, then quieted suddenly as a man walked across the stage and adjusted his microphone. Seven others followed behind him, all dressed the same: in their pinstriped concentration camp prisoner uniforms. The crowd made a collective gasp. Some began to cry at the sight of those detestable uniforms while painful memories they never wanted to think of again flooded their minds. A few laughed uncomfortably as if at a joke they didn't understand. Most stood in shock, waiting for what was to come next.

The man who came out to check the microphone tapped it twice, leaned forward, and said in English, "I'm Henry Chaim Baigelman, and we are The Happy Boys!"

A lively swing song erupted from the ensemble. The crowd broke out of their trance as they swayed and clapped to the tune. Some tried to dance, and as they elbowed themselves into spaces for their steps and movements, a small dance floor formed. Everyone crowded closer together and gaiety pulsed through the room. Nikolas stood in one place but swayed his upper body, enjoying the tune and watching the musicians play their instruments.

Who could have imagined such happiness from men wearing these wretched clothes? It was an absurd and glorious sight. If everyone in that room had not already realized the miracle of having survived something so extraordinary, the time was now. The Nazis had tried to destroy those who lived at the Korbach DP camp and anyone who wore those terrible costumes. But the absolute failure of Hitler and hatred was never more evident. Those striped threads no longer held power. You could joyfully play the accordion all night in the zebra outfit the Nazis once made you wear. It was simply clothing now, cotton and stitches and buttons. They were still alive. They were free!

The swing song ended and Henry Baigelman approached the microphone. The violinist came close to him. The crowd hushed. Nikolas looked at Anna, and she glanced back at him.

Henry sang. A haunting, slow melody in Yiddish flowed from him. Nikolas leaned toward Ira, who blinked back tears.

"What is he saying?" Nikolas asked. Ira paused and breathed out a sigh. He translated:  
"He is singing about Home.  
'We long for a home.  
Where can we find such a place?  
Every road is closed to us, we must keep on hoping.  
We can't do otherwise.  
The beauty, charm, and promise will come back into our lives.  
A warm, inviting home as before,  
For our misery, the only cure.  
The past was filled with evil,  
We prayed for better lives.  
Now we want again to live  
The right time has arrived."

Tears wet Nikolas' cheeks. He was in good company; there was not a dry eye in the building. The violin sang, gliding along in an ocean of hope and grief.

Nikolas yearned for his heart to become whole once again. He longed for a home.  
The right time had arrived.

He shoved and excused his way through the crowd to Anna. *If not now, then when?*  
They could all die tomorrow, killed by any other number of madmen that still roamed the earth. There was no time to lose. She would have him, or she would not. It was time for them both to decide.

Guided only by the desires of his heart, he approached Anna. She looked up at Nikolas as he came to her. They held their breaths. He stood before her and leaned in, closing the space between them.

The song ended, and everyone stilled in reverence. The band members whispered to each other, and a jaunty tune started from the fiddle and piano. Nikolas knew the song. Almost everyone did as The Lambeth Walk was a popular tune.

Nikolas was flooded with the ecstasy of realizing that his life was a precious gift. And to find someone who wanted to hold your hand through life's exquisite pain and joyful elation? This was yet another miraculous gift he could not deny.

Anna took a half step backward from Nikolas and outstretched her hands. Nikolas interlaced his fingers into hers. Their brown eyes blended. The first few stanzas of The Lambeth Walk continued, and they exploded into a simultaneous grin. Nikolas and Anna strutted with the other couples on the dance floor. In unison, they made linked-arm turns, slapped their knees, clapped once, and threw their hands up with a cheerful "Hey!"

The mood of the room was intoxicating and Nikolas nearly floated. Every time he leaned forward to slap his knees, he inched closer to Anna. He breathed in the floral scent on her skin. Embroidered roses the color of her lips bloomed around the neck of her blouse. Her dark curls framed her face like a work of art. She was radiant, a mesmerizing sight to behold. Her brightness reached the very depths of him, casting out every shadow.

Wasyl cowered in a corner of the schoolhouse, his cheekbone still bruised the same shade of yellow as Nikolas' knuckles. He stood and scowled at Nikolas and Anna as they danced. At one point, Wasyl marched angrily into the crowd of dancers and tried to shove Nikolas away from Anna. Nikolas' roommates, Danylo and Yakiv, saw Wasyl barreling into the crowd. They intercepted, shoving Wasyl and giving him a warning glare. The men watched protectively as Wasyl huffed off the dance floor and back into his corner to sulk. In their happiness, Anna and Nikolas kept watch on each other, grinning, oblivious to all else. They were free and lost in the music.

Ira watched Nikolas and Anna dancing and saw how they looked at each other. He now understood why Nikolas had acted so strangely earlier. Ira couldn't deny the magnetism between Anna and Nick, and Ira loved to see his friend so happy. Swaying to the music beside Ira was Sofiy, one of Anna's friends. Ira smiled at her, and she at him. Ira liked to bluff, but he knew a losing hand when he was dealt one. It was time to reshuffle the deck. Sofiy softly grasped Ira's arm, and his crush on Anna was quashed.

When the song ended, Nikolas grabbed Anna's hand. They zigzagged their way to the front of the schoolhouse together and burst the doors open. Anna shrieked in delight as the chilled air rushed against her warm skin. They bound hand-in-hand down the schoolhouse steps like giddy children after the last bell.

Nikolas pulled Anna close to him under the glowing pearl moonlight. At last, as he'd imagined so many times, he cupped Anna's head inside his hands and drew her face toward his own. Their lips met in a lingering kiss, sealing the beginning of their journey together. Their lives coiled together as Nikolas and Anna found a home with each other. With only the currency of love to offer each other, Nikolas began his life with Anna in the Korbach DP camp. From the seeds of hope and faith, everything began to grow.

**Srimayee Gangopadhyay**

***Like a Wallflower***

Like a wallflower,  
I've stood in wait for none;  
Stirred, perhaps, awhile by your cellophane laughter  
Its crinkly cadence I couldn't perfectly preserve;  
I've benumbed emotions that are my own.

I was ... a hurricane lopsided on that aching spot,  
Searching for spaces to inhabit within itself-  
Lesions it has that testify  
What had once been young,  
There are traces of what has been and has not ...

It might not seem that way, but  
Every night is a curtain of a different dye;  
Seen through the strange crisscross of leaves  
Running clumsily like a hurried script,  
I told myself I've learnt to read between the lines.

Like a wallflower, I've shed petals before,  
I've been washed ashore on alien anchorage  
Yet bore no hostility to a subconscious gaze or two  
Though creepers whispered there was  
Something hostile about my visage.

Like a wallflower,  
I've known the tempo of open and shut,  
Like valves of the heart,  
That forever letting in, letting out;  
For those searching for spaces to inhabit within ...

**Jill Ann Carey**

***Four Walls***

These four walls are watching me  
Relentless spectators  
As they sneak closer

I slowly breathe out in hopes they will return  
Back to the wide open room I walked into  
But they stubbornly refuse

Smoke from the fireplace stings my eyes  
I dare not blink for fear the walls will slip inward  
Closer still

Unwillingly I rub my eyes  
Burning from the dry heated air  
I open them and half wonder how close they are now

Still the same walls  
Still hindering my breathing  
Still putting stolen pressure on the room

If I could escape outside for air  
They would only wait for my return to pressurize the room  
Again making it hard to breathe

These four walls are watching me



***Embroideries***

If paintings could come to life, and songs prophesise,  
I'd blow the dust off all the things I buried as a child ...  
Like that bell sleeved sweater, tulip shaped, hand knitted  
with loops of fairy threads  
Sleeves that make it seem I had your arms embracing mine;  
I'd paint us on the shore you had once gone as a child,  
And observed the lattices made by the waves  
With a craftsman's precision to draw the same  
For her granddaughter's would-be dress.  
If today's fallen kites could be yesterday's vinyl strips,  
I'd say the vandalized beaches are eternized at the seams ...  
Likewise, I preserved the contours that lined your kind face,  
Though days, like grains, are liable to get blown away;  
In my soul, I have recorded the rhythm and deftness  
Of an artist's hand,  
That used to filigree paisleys, and fill voids.  
I'd continue to collect oyster shells to button our little world  
Of beady rains, and languid light,  
To hue the drapes  
In a cramped camphoric room,  
Of cherished delight.



## *Jade and the Red Oni*

The clash of steel on steel filled the room. Panting breath, grunts, and the rumblings of two warriors engaged in combat. Jade thrust and slashed her katana with expertise few could rival, but her opponent was much more experienced. Her daimyo, Tokugawa Musashi, knew her every move before she executed it. His katana parried and deflected each attack and he seemed to hardly move a muscle. Jade admired how cool and calm her master was, clothed in his deep blue kimono. His black hair had been pulled back into a topknot, one of the many symbols of the samurai.

"You move too quickly," Tokugawa said. Jade realized too late what her master meant as she went to disengage. He followed up with a swipe from the broadside of his blade, which smacked her hip painfully. Jade yelped, but her master wasn't finished. His leg swept out and sent her sprawling to the floor.

"You've forgotten the flowing-water cut," Tokugawa said as Jade picked herself up from the floor. She adjusted her red kimono and bowed obediently to her master.

"*Gomen nasai, Daimyo-sama,*" she said.

"You've much to learn, young one. Nevertheless, you're the best of my retainers." He turned around, looking out from the sparring room at the tranquil lake behind his summer home.

"*Daimyo-sama*, I don't understand. There are many samurai under your charge that are stronger and more experienced warriors than me," Jade said. Tokugawa turned to regard her, and she kowtowed to him, thinking she overstepped in questioning his sentiment.

"There's more to being a samurai than being an outstanding warrior. You have the best *shinzo*, or heart, as they say in the common tongue." He turned back to look out over the water again.

Jade moved to stand just behind him to his right and waited. He had not dismissed her. Often, Tokugawa would have her stay, as if her very presence brought him peace.

"I need you to do something for me, Jade-san. There is a man in the east who used to be in my service. He dishonored me and my clan, but refused to perform seppuku. Now he wanders as a ronin. I know this man, and he will not rest until my head is removed from my shoulders. Find him and eliminate the threat."

"What is this man's name, *Daimyo-sama*?"

"He's cast aside his former name, preferring to go by the moniker of the Red Oni. I hear he terrorizes the townsfolk of Goken. The local lord has lost control of the situation, and I mean to take matters into my own hands through my vassal." He turned to regard Jade then and smiled. "I know that you will not fail."

"When should I leave, *Daimyo-sama*?" Jade bowed, unsure how to take the compliment other than to remain stoic in his presence.

"At once. Do not return until the Red Oni is vanquished. To do otherwise would be a great dishonor," Tokugawa said. He waved a hand, dismissing her from his side. Jade bowed and exited the room. She wandered back to her small quarters. Her armor and weapons stood in a corner against the wall in an extremely organized fashion.

Jade immediately donned her armor, lacquered leather plates with a chest piece of iron. Tightly braided cords of maroon thread decorated each plate. She placed a kabuto on her head and fastened it with a chin cord. With her armor equipped, she gathered her various weapons and pack of supplies before heading to the stables to fetch a horse. A stableboy assisted her in getting a black mare ready for travel.

"That's a lot of weapons," he remarked as she secured her *naginata*, *wakizashi*, and *yumi* to her horse.

"*Daimyo-sama* instructs us to be well-versed in many weapons, using the best one for the specific situation," Jade replied as she stroked the neck of her horse. "What's her name?"

"Onyx," the boy replied. "She's my favorite horse."

"And I'll do well to take care of her. Bushi no *ichi-gon*. You have my word, young one." With a nudge, she guided the horse out of the stable and onto the road leading east. Farms, orchards, and wood mills darted the landscape. Rolling hills undulated over the earth. The great Imani River could be heard when the birds quieted and could be seen as it snaked closer to the road. It slithered away like a snake after a short while, though, leaving behind only its whispering murmur and freshwater scent. The road led through a sparse forest filled with coniferous trees and certain maple trees indigenous to this land. Small crimson leaves sprouted from grayish-white wood, like a skeleton weeping bloody tears.

As she broke through to the other side of the woods, Jade saw a small fishing village along the bank of the Imani. She decided to make a stop there, for she knew that pushing her horse too hard would make her more prone to injury.

*And I made a promise to take care of her.*

Many women looked at her with awe as she rode into the village. Men carried buckets of fish to their spouses, who gutted and hung them. *Likely to sell at the market tomorrow.* She dismounted Onyx and led her to the stables. With the toss of a few coins, she secured Onyx a place to rest for the evening.

*I should do the same for myself before it gets too late.*

In a village this small, it wasn't difficult to find the local watering hole. In her native tongue, such places were called ryokan. When she stepped inside, the sweet aroma of burning incense hung in the air.

*Lavender and sakura.* Many fishermen sat on the floor over very low tables. They clutched small goblets of sake or bowls of soba noodles in their hands. The scent of cooking fish and soup mixed with the incense, giving a homely feeling to the *ryokan*. She sat a few tables away from the two men and a servant girl quickly rushed to place a bowl of soup before her.

"Sake?" she asked, her voice low so as not to disturb the other guests.

"*Hai, kudasai,*" Jade replied. The servant bowed to her and went to fetch an ornate decanter made from glazed clay. The sake warmed her goblet, and she sipped it. Jade coughed as it burned her throat. She picked up her bamboo chopsticks and slurped her noodles. As she ate, Jade noticed two men bickering, their voices getting louder as their tempers flared. She eyed them cautiously, but didn't intervene. *I'll fix this problem if it becomes my problem to solve.* She continued to slurp her noodles. The servant girl went to wait on the two men, whose voices escalated as they shook their fists at each other. It was clear that both had consumed far too much sake.

"I'm the more desirable male," the first man in the tan hakama said. "For I am strong and work hard for my living."

"Strength is fine, but you will wither as time passes. I have inherited great wealth from my father. I do not have to work and can afford all the luxuries this life has to offer. Any woman would want me," the other, in the midnight blue hakama, responded.

"You there, servant girl." The man wagged his finger as he slurred his speech. "Tell us which of us you'd rather marry. A strong farmer like myself or a spoiled rich boy like him?"

The servant girl bowed several times, shuffling her feet awkwardly.

"Come on now, girl. Speak up," the second man said impatiently.

"Hiro-san, I'm afraid I cannot answer your question," the girl said. "I'm not attracted to any male."

"Bah! Preposterous. Every woman must marry a man. It is the way of things," Hiro said, and the second man nodded in agreement.

"Perhaps we should show her what she's missing," the rich man said with a fiendish grin. Jade saw the servant girl look back at her with eyes wide with terror.

"Hiro-san, I'm sorry. I must get back to work." She went to leave the men to their bickering, but Hiro would not let her go that easy. He snatched her wrist and pulled her toward him.

"Where do you think you're going?" Hiro's speech was slurred. Jade stood up then and moved toward the trio. Her hands rested on the hilts of her swords, which hung on her hips by an *uwa-obi*, or silk sash around her waist.

"Let her go," Jade said, her green eyes flashing dangerously at the pair of men.

"Oh, look here, Inazo. We've got ourselves a woman who fancies herself a samurai. Must be that one I've heard about up at the *Daimyo's* palace," Hiro said.

The servant girl struggled in his grasp, but she could not break free.

"Let her go. I will not say it a third time," Jade ordered, her voice calm but stern.

"Or what, samurai? You'll use your blades against us?" Inazo jeered.

"I don't need these for the likes of you. It would be a waste of effort," Jade said. Her hands left the hilts of her weapons, coming up in a defensive *jujutsu* posture. Inazo charged at her, knocking over the bowls of soup in the process. He swung wildly, and Jade easily sidestepped the strike. She stuck out a foot, sending him down to the floor.

Hiro followed his compatriot's lead, attempting to catch Jade off guard. She caught him at the wrist and twisted it in a powerful lock. He cried out in pain as she sent him to the floor beside his friend.

"Leave this establishment," Jade commanded.

"I'll not be bested by a woman!" Hiro said, getting back to his feet and lunging at her again. His arms came out wide, attempting to place her in a bear hug. Up came her right leg, her foot snapping into his chin, mouth, and nose. With a crunch, her boot broke several bones in the man's face, blood pouring from a split lip and off-center nostrils. The strike sent him down on his backside in a daze.

"Leave. Now." Her tone sounded calm, but inside, a righteous fury burned in Jade's heart. A growl rumbled in the timbre of her command, and all who witnessed the event could tell that she was done playing games.

"Come on, Hiro. Let's go," Inazo said. The two drunks stumbled out of the establishment, a trail of blood marking their exit. Jade turned to the servant girl, who had already begun cleaning up the spilled soup and blood. She kneeled down next to the woman and grabbed a rag to help clean.

"*Ni Bushi-sama*," the servant girl said, shaking her head.

"It's all right. I'm not above cleaning. Besides, I'm partially responsible for the mess anyway," Jade said. "What's your name?"

"Emi," the girl responded.

"Emi, if those men bother you again, I want you to make them regret ever darkening your threshold again."

"*Hai, Bushi-sama*," Emi said, her eyes fixated on her work.

"Just call me Jade." The two women continued to clean. Eventually, they finished and stood up from the floor. "Perhaps I should escort you home, just in case? Or you could stay with me in my room here at the *ryokan*?"

Emi blushed at the suggestions, but she did not decline. "Let me finish closing, Jade-sama," was all she said, and Jade simply nodded. She sipped on sake and enjoyed some shrimp dumplings Emi brought out from the kitchen. As the other patrons wandered out, Emi cleaned their tables until the place was empty, save for the two women.

"I'd like to stay with you, Jade-sama. If that's still all right," Emi said, bowing slightly.

"Of course. I'll watch over you." Jade escorted Emi to her room, which had a stool, a small bed, and a trunk to store belongings. "Take the bed. I'll stand guard for a while. Never know how bold ruffians can be." Emi smiled as Jade took her seat. Without warning, the servant girl stroked Jade's cheek and kissed her lightly on the lips. She pulled away, turning her face with a bashful countenance. Jade cupped her chin in her fingers, turning Emi's gaze toward her. Both women smiled.

"Domo, Emi-san. You should get some rest," Jade said, her hand coming up to hold Emi's.

Their eyes lingered on each other for what seemed like an eternity before Emi stripped to her undergarments and climbed into the bed. Jade sat on the stool, watching both Emi and the door. She kept watch for several hours, but nothing was heard. Satisfied that the drunks had likely passed out in their beds, she secured the door with a flimsy chain fitting before getting into bed. *If the universe had any sense of justice, they'd be passed out in a pigpen.* She held Emi close the rest of the night, and Jade couldn't help but feel that she belonged in her arms.

*This love is forbidden. A bushi and a servant could never work.* Jade's thoughts fought against the contentment she felt in that moment. Her throat closed up as a painful sob threatened to escape, but she swallowed it down like the terrible medicine given to her as a child. *I'll not think of what cannot be. I shall live for this moment, no matter how short it is.*

The morning sun and singing of birds awoke Jade. She groaned and sat up.

"O genki des ka, Jade-sama?" Emi asked, her fingers caressing the small of Jade's back.

"Genki des," Jade responded. "I must be going. I have another day of travel ahead of me."

"Where are you going?" Emi sat up in bed, watching Jade get dressed.

"I'm on a mission from my daimyo. I'm to take down the Red Oni in the town of Goken."

"Oh, I've heard stories from travelers of the Red Oni. They say he isn't human."

Jade stopped strapping on her boots and looked at Emi curiously.

"And what else do the travelers say?"

"He's stronger than ten men. The Red Oni's martial prowess is infamous. Every morning, he goes to the center of the village demanding a duel. He's never lost."

"And what if nobody challenges him?" Jade asked as she finished strapping her boots.

"Then he takes food and supplies. He always comes from the mountains to the north. The villagers suspect that he lives in one of the caves."

"He needs to be stopped. The Red Oni uses fear and malice to command respect. This is not the way of the samurai." Jade stood and stooped down to brush a kiss on Emi's lips.

"*Bushi-sama*, do not go," Emi said. She reached for Jade's hand and clasped it. Jade could see the fear in her eyes.

She fears she'll never see me again.

"Have no fear, Emi-chan. I'm confident that I can stop this ronin's schemes. And when the deed is done, I shall stop back here to see you. If you'll allow it," Jade said. But should I see her again? *It would be unbecoming of me to enjoy the fruits of her love.* Despite these thoughts, Jade smiled, her desire to see Emi again overriding any decorum or protocol coming to mind.

"*Hai*," Emi said, nodding. A few tears dripped from her eyes but she forced a smile. "Take care, Jade-sama."

"And you as well." Jade left the room and made for the stables. Onyx was there, waiting for Jade to return so they could continue their journey. After getting the saddle and bridle set up, the two were off on the eastward road.

Jade passed long stretches of farmland. Sugarcane, rice, and bok choy grew in scattered patches. Fields for grazing pigs, goats, and sheep also caught her eyes. She found a sense of serenity in the calmness of it all. Several merchant caravans passed her along the way, each of them bowing in deference to the samurai. Eventually, she came to a much larger town at the base of a great mountain. Jade wasn't sure which mountain it was until she asked a passing middle-aged woman.

"That's Mount Yama," she said. "The Red Oni comes from there."

"What do you know of him? I wish to rid this town of his presence."

The woman began shaking her head before Jade had even finished her sentence.

"The Red Oni will kill you, *Bushi-sama*. You should leave while you can." Before Jade could question her further, the older woman walked away. Jade scowled, but not at the woman. Her gaze went to Mount Yuma, wondering if the Red Oni gazed back down at her from on high. She walked Onyx to a stable before finding another *ryokan*. There, she went to her room and began donning her armor. *I'll need a place to stay after this business with the Red Oni is concluded.*

She finished by strapping her kabuto to her head with a chin strap before moving out into the street once again. All the townsfolk gave her a wide berth.

*They fear for their lives. I can see it in their eyes.*

She found a stump and sat down on it near the road that led toward Mount Yuma. As she waited, a young man approached her. He wore an older hakama in cream and tan colors. His black hair seemed nicely kept, except for the bangs which hung over his eyes.

"*Bushi-sama*, would you allow me to play you a song?" He produced a samisen and plucked a few chords on it.

"I'm awaiting the Red Oni. You'd be wise to keep a safe distance," Jade said.

"Oh, don't worry, *Bushi-sama*. I simply wish to serenade you before your fight. If anything, it'll bring you peace and a rational mind."

"Play for me," Jade said.

The man struck the strings, performing a beautiful tune for nearly an hour. As the sun dipped below the horizon, a figure emerged, coming from the mountain road.

"The Red Oni approaches," the man whispered, plucking an eerie tune on his samisen. Jade stood, her hands on the hilts of her swords. She watched and waited patiently as the towering warrior approached. He wore armor similar to Jade's. The leather plates appeared dyed maroon while the chords shone a blood-red hue. A red *mengu* concealed the *ronin's* face. He held his katana in his gloved hands already as he moved toward them. The closer he got, the more Jade could see that this man towered nearly a foot above anyone in the village. His broad shoulders and chest made it evident how this warrior had defeated so many opponents. There was an otherworldly or preternatural aura about him that Jade couldn't quite place, but she didn't let a hint of fear flash across her countenance.

"A samurai comes to die," the Red Oni stated, his voice deep and echoed beneath the *mengu*.

"If that is my fate," Jade responded. She drew her katana, standing ready for the inevitable onslaught.

The Red Oni chuckled, a deep throaty sound. The wind whistled as it rushed past the two warriors. Tension hung thick in the air.

With a sudden lunge, the Red Oni slashed with his blade, but Jade pivoted to evade the attack. It was then that she noticed that his sword appeared as black as night, save for many striations of orange and yellow, as if lava seeped from the core of the blade itself. Her backhanded strike connected with her opponent's *mengu*, cracking it and staggering the wearer.

"Musashi-san has taught you well," he said.



"San? You presume to be his equal?" Jade asked. The mere thought that this *ronin* could consider himself a peer of her *daimyo* infuriated her. *He's a disgrace to the name of samurai. This man has no honor, no loyalty, and certainly no rectitude.* She took a breath and calmed her emotions, remembering what her master had taught her.

"The angry man will defeat himself in battle and in life," he would say when she would get frustrated, especially during the early days of her training as a samurai.

"You have superb control over your emotions. You're very disciplined. For a *woman*," the Red Oni said. Jade ignored the slight to her honor, keeping her eyes focused on the large man before her.

"A coward hides behind a mask," Jade said. "Take off your *mengu* and face me like a true samurai. You were one once. Die like one today with honor."

"You might be frightened if I remove the mask," the Red Oni replied. Before Jade could reply, her foe came at her again. His sword rushed toward her in a thrust, but Jade parried it aside and returned her own sword back in front of her. Cobalt sparks flew from their blades, fluttering like fireflies around them as their swords clashed. Instead of a follow-up sword strike, the Red Oni kicked out at her. His heavy boot struck her chest-piece and sent her staggering backward. On the Red Oni came, his assault unrelenting and brutal.

Jade struggled to deflect his attacks, and several found purchase on her armor. Her blood splattered the ground for wounds on her sides, but she would not give up. She could see that the Red Oni breathed heavier and his attacks became sluggish as the fight continued. As her opponent went to strike her again, Jade countered with several quick thrusts of her own. Her enemy parried the first, but Jade expected that he would. She reversed direction, stabbing up at his throat.

The Red Oni tried to bring his katana up, but his tired arms couldn't match Jade's speed. He turned his face, but her sword struck his *mengu*. It shattered into pieces as the warrior cried out in pain. Black blood sprayed out onto the ground. Jade stood, a grin creasing her face. The Red Oni wrenched what remained of his mask from his face and turned to reveal a ghastly visage.

The Red Oni's skin blazed a crimson hue and his eyes blazed like the sun. Enormous and jagged teeth erupted from his large plum-colored lips. Ebony blood ran from a gash in his cheek.

"You'll die for that, samurai," the Red Oni said, spitting out a thick wad of blood.



"You're supposed to be human." Jade tried unsuccessfully to hide the shock in her voice.

"I've become something more than a man. I found salvation deep within the mountain. It has given me power you can't even begin to comprehend. Now, face your death."

Jade took on a defensive stance as her opponent charged at her again, his strength apparently rejuvenated. The Red Oni slashed at her wildly, his rage blinding him in his fury. Jade ducked and dipped around his strikes, her sword slashing across his sides and his outer thighs.

"Gah!" he cried, trying desperately to catch Jade. "Why can't I catch you? Stand still and fight me!"

"Have you forgotten what our *daimyo* taught us? The essence of fighting is the art of moving at the right time," Jade recited. Her retort only served to enrage her foe further. Just as he went in for a killing stroke, Jade sprung forward and thrust her blade deep into his chest. The Red Oni staggered and dropped his sword. His hands came up to clutch the hilt of her katana.

"It's over," Jade said, one hand on the hilt of her wakizashi just in case.

"I'm an oni. You cannot best me. My sword was forged in the deepest lava pools of the mountain. I can't lose."

"It is the strongest spirit that wins, not the most expensive sword," Jade said, once again quoting her master.

"Loyal samurai." The Red Oni spat out black blood onto the ground. "You haven't seen the last of me. There are worlds beyond this one, and I shall find one to conquer." A door of flame opened behind him, the sudden blaze causing Jade to retreat. She couldn't see with the thick smoke that now clouded her vision and stung her eyes. When it cleared, the oni had disappeared. Only her katana and his lay on the ground before a black scorch mark.

"Wow! You did it. You bested him!" the bard said, plucking a victorious tune on his samisen.

Jade smiled, but went down to one knee as her wounds finally started to catch up to her.

"Are you all right, *Bushi-sama*?"

Jade barely heard him, his voice sounding more distant with each syllable. Her vision darkened, and the ground came up to meet her.

She awoke with a start. Pain wracked her abdomen, arms, and legs, causing her to wince. A hiss of protest escaped her lips. A small hand clasped hers, startling Jade.

"*Gomen nasai, Jade-san,*" Emi whispered.

"Emi. How did I get here?" Jade looked around the room and noticed that it looked like the one she'd stayed in before.

"The people of Goken brought you back here. I recognized you and offered to take care of you until you recovered. They seemed agreeable to this proposal, as they wished to return to their town to work and provide for their families," Emi explained.

Jade lay back down and looked up at Emi's beautiful face, which was illuminated by a streak of moonlight coming in through the window. "How long was I out?"

"Several days, I believe. They kept you in Goken before deciding to bring you to *Musashi-sama.*"

"What about my horse? I promised someone I'd take care of her."

"I don't think your horse was brought along, but I shall hire someone to fetch her for you. You'll be bedridden for a few more days, I'd reckon. You certainly took a beating."

"I gave as good as I got," Jade quipped with a grin.

"At least you came back to me," Emi said. She planted a kiss on Jade's forehead.

"Now rest. When you are able, I shall send you off to your *daimyo.*"

Jade nodded and fell back to sleep, even though her stiff and sore body made it difficult to find a comfortable position. After several days of rest, she finally felt well enough to ride back to her master. Emi saw her off in the early morning.

"When shall I see you again?" she asked.

"I'm not sure we can see each other again," Jade said.

Emi turned her eyes to the ground, her countenance turned to one of dismay.

"I am samurai, Emi-san. Many would oppose our bonding on those grounds alone."

"I understand, Jade-sama." Defeat filled Emi's voice.

"And I did not kill my foe. There's a possibility I may have to commit *seppuku* for my *daimyo*. I failed in my task."



Emi reached into her kimono and pulled forth a small fan. Jade could see that the design of a great blue wave decorated it's *ougimen*. Emi handed it to her and closed Jade's fingers over it.

"Take it, Jade-sama. Remember me every time you look upon it. And if *seppuku* is required of you, I hope that your master will allow you to be buried with it close to your heart," Emi said, tears flowing down her face.

*Kami give me strength.* A single tear streaked down Jade's face, which she quickly wiped away. *No one can see me like this.*

"*Domo arigato gozaimasu, Emi-sama,*" Jade whispered, barely able to get the words past the lump in her throat. They bowed to each other before Jade spurred her horse into a light trot back to her master's estate. When she arrived, she washed her hands before passing through the *Torii Gates*. Her master stood in the training room, gazing out to watch the sun rise in the eastern sky. Jade dropped to her knees and bowed low, waiting for her master to address her.

"I've been waiting for you, Jade," he said. "News has already reached me of your success. Strange tales have I heard of an oni and fiery portals." He turned to regard her. "Tell me what happened."

Jade lifted herself from the floor but remained kneeling. She presented the oni's sword to her master, whose eyes widened with awe at the strange black blade with veins of lava marring its surface. *He's going to ask me to commit seppuku. I've failed in my task to slay my foe.* She stamped out the dread growing like a fire in her belly. *If that's what my daimyo asks of me, then so be it.*

"The Red Oni had become something not entirely human. I stabbed him in the chest, but he fled to another world. I failed to kill him, master. If it pleases you, I shall commit *seppuku* to atone for my failure," Jade said.

"Failure? Your enemy has fled, and likely for good. Although he has become an oni and a ronin, he was once a samurai. His pride will never allow him to return to a place where he was so bested. He shall try to find weaker foes to conquer. No, Jade-san, I think we've seen the last of him." He turned back toward the east before continuing. "But if he does return, I know that I have at least one vassal able to defeat him."

"*Hai, daimyo-sama,*" Jade said, bowing to the floor once again.

"Take a week to rest. You've certainly earned it. I shall bestow upon you an extra stipend. Enjoy the pleasures this life has to offer. The only thing we have to fear in this life is one that has gone unlived. And perhaps one unloved as well."

*"Hai, daimyo-sama,"* Jade said.

"You're dismissed. Await my summons one week hence."

Jade bowed and strode from the room. By that evening, she lay in the embrace of Emi in the room where she had recovered after her ordeal.

Daimyo is right. The only thing we have to fear is a life unlived or unloved. I don't know if I'll ever truly live, but I know without a doubt that I am loved. She held Emi closer and fell asleep.



**Timothy Quezada**

***Crooked Tree***

Did we plant a crooked tree?  
Sylvans to society

Other trees complain it poses perils in the park  
Yet have we pondered what is beneath the bark?  
For the tree still grows and the tree is life  
Through the storms endured and the inner strife.

This tree is different take it out of here!  
Cry the straight trees in ostensive fear.

Now the chain saw buzzes as the axe is wield  
While the crooked tree dreams of a lonely field  
Where our seeds would produce symbols of we  
Who wish to plant a crooked tree.

***Fujisan***

Clouds beam buoyant light  
Ancient soul of Fujisan  
Radiance Rising

**Ron Breines**

***The Beach***

There is a beach near my home in Yamada  
Onna-son, where junk from across the sea  
rolls in with the white caps and tides,  
and never leaves.

Where we arrive with bags to load the refuse,  
mainly domestic: shoes, bottles, clocks; but  
a few turtles have also washed up amongst  
the debris of our lives.

Today, a cat washed up with a small rubber  
boat, disconnected from each other I suppose,  
bloated, mouth gaping, there is a story in  
how it lived.

And the float too might have a story to tell,  
of how it carried particles from one beach to  
another, or how many crabs are going to bury  
beneath the bow.

But the particles might be as interesting as the  
life of the cat, to another particle, or it might  
tell its story backwards, into the depths of the  
lives of matter.

And the turtle too who once glided through space,  
between canyons and crevices deep in the fluids  
of material whorls, tells of ethereal patterns it has  
become the embodiment of.

As I touch my foot upon the sand, then shift  
weight into the story I create, into the connection of  
us all here on the beach in Onna, where we all  
have merged harmoniously.

Cord A. Scott

### ***Kriegie Kapers: Cartoons of Prison Life in WWII***

With the recent airing of the Amblin Entertainment WWII miniseries *Masters of the Air*, there is not only a resurgence of interest in the air battles engaged by the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) but also what happened when they were shot down over occupied territory. There have been other media representations of the conditions encountered by captured Allied forces, with three of the most known being the 1953 movie *Stalag 17*, the 1963 movie *The Great Escape*, and the 1965-1971 TV show *Hogan's Heroes*, which aired on the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in the United States. But while these representations were the perception of life in a PoW camp, they also had footing in real accounts. The series itself is based on Don Miller's *Masters of the Air* (2006), as well as Harry Crosby's personal account *A Wing and a Prayer* (1993). This paper will not look at those sources except in an ancillary role but will instead look at two visual accounts in cartoon form, *Achtung Luft Stalag I*, and *Handle with Care* for life inside a PoW camp.

*Handle With Care: A Book of Prison camp sketches drawn and written in Prison Camps in Germany* was written by Richard Anderson and D. Westmacott. It was conceived in May of 1943, yet was finally produced in 1946 not long after the war. It was based on illustrations originally drawn and smuggled out or re-drawn later by PoWs. The book essentially followed the life of a captured airman, starting with the phrase often repeated "For you the war is over" (p. 4-5) followed by a whirlwind of events, interrogation by legal and semi-illegal means to glean intelligence on the war effort, the registering with the Red Cross, and the inevitable attempt to plan an escape. Some of these attempts were rather foolish as the cartoon notes: wait until he looks the other way, then you hop over the wire" apparently oblivious to the several other sets of wire that one would need to get to simply to get to the guard towers (p.9).

Other drawings mentioned specific camps where events occurred. For instance, one cartoon showed the warning sign near the barbed wire noting that no warning would be given. There was at the Heydekrug camp – Stalag Luft IV - in current day Silute, Lithuania, (Anderson and Westmacott 1946, 12), Thorn, Netherlands, and Wolfsberg - now Ilmenau, Germany (13). Another aspect of camp life was obtaining simple necessities such as matches. This was further complicated by those enterprising Allied servicemen who might be able to barter (or steal) supplies to run their own "rackets." This was the premise of the play, later movie *Stalag 17*, and it was noted with comedic effect here as well, with the racketeer as a rather corpulent man, while others were clearly thin and malnourished (18). This also was exacerbated by some who volunteered for work details to haul in, then distribute Red Cross parcels. The idea here was that some of the items might have been pilfered by racketeers (23).



Not surprisingly, with so much time on one's hands, the proliferation of artists occurred. Some drew sketches of fellow prisoners (Anderson and Westmacott 1946, 47) while others simply wanted to watch and converse as there was little else to do inside of a building where up to 150 men were crammed in bunks three high, and restricted in their movement (20-21, 26). One cartoon even described the Heydekrug camp in detail (52-53). Other cartoons discussed the use of gardens or weather conditions to show how tunnels were being dug. Obviously, some of these cartoons were done well after the artists were released from the camps. One cartoon even gave a nod to the World War I cartoonist Bill Bairnsfather, and his famous cartoon "The Better Hole," in this case with the subject not referring to a foxhole on the front, but the entrance to the escape tunnel (54).

Perhaps one the biggest nods to the book was the reference to *Handle with Care* as it was being written, when the artist had to hide the images during a Gestapo search of the barracks area, only to have them confiscated and later re-created. This, combined with other searches by the "goons" were often referenced in the movie *the Great Escape*. In this case, the frantic prisoners are hiding all items of importance, be they maps, escape materials or the contents of the book (Anderson and Westmacott 1946, 67-68).

The book also noted the stress of moving from one camp to another, especially as the war went on. Lives were disrupted, personal items amassed had to be carried by the owner, and the stress of having to restart any sort of escape system had to be conceived and executed anew later. Clearly there were some common occurrences between the conditions that Anderson and Westmacott, and those who wrote *Stalag 17* or *the Great Escape*.

### ***Welcome to POW Camp: Stalag Luft 1, Barth Germany***

The second book in this general theme was that of *Welcome to POW Camp: Stalag Luft 1, Barth Germany* written by RAF Flight Sgt. Budgen and Squadron Leader B. Archt, a Belgian attached to the RAF (2). This camp was located on the German coast and contained approximately 8000 fliers of various nationalities (2). It was there that the "Kriegies" as they referred to themselves, tried to pass the time while the war dragged on (1). There were many US fliers located in the camp, with a total of four compounds, each segregated by nationality or in the case of Jewish prisoners, by religion (4). The first part of the book not only described the camp, but also how many of the men once they bailed out of whatever airplane they were in, found themselves in the camp. This is also a theme that the series *Masters of the Air* dealt with starting in episode 3, when one US Sergeant William Quinn had to bail out, then escape towards safety in Spain (Episode 3,4). The concept of being a prisoner of war was also expanded in later episodes with the experiences of Majors Cleven and Egan.

While *Handle with Care* dealt with similar topics within the camps, *Welcome to PoW Camp!* dealt with more specific issues. For example, the idea of recreation is one that is prevalent in any confined setting, but in this book the issues of recreation included the loss of balls to restricted areas, the fight over the grounds on which various games might be played. As this book dealt with more Americans than the previous one, the discussion of baseball and the terms associated with it were more common (“All balled up”). Other cartoons referenced ice skating (“Ups and downs on ice”) rugby (“rugby on the green”) baseball (“baseball on the diamond”) or even mud/puddle regattas for homemade boats (“After rain the Kriegies play”).

Other forms of mental escape included the library which consisted of any books obtained on subjects ranging from vocational trades to mysteries (“Rumpus in the reading room”; “what sort of mystery is this?”). Lectures on the war, or on other topics were also commonplace. One theme was obtaining information on the war effort to both keep track, but also plan for possible resistance to or escape from camp into friendly hands (“GI Generals”).

Food and animals associated with possible food were another focus. As with any conflict, basic nutritional needs were not met, and often the prisoners had to become resourceful when trying to stretch meager food allotments or Red Cross parcels. Several cartoons dealt with the topic of cooking food, be it soup, bread via ad hoc baking ovens (“The bakery – Boy Scout style”), or even capturing rabbits, cats or dogs to supplement meat. The last cartoon, concerning a German guard dog, noted that the artist received a week in solitary confinement for the illustration. Additional infractions and their time in solitary confinement were documented in another cartoon (“back to solitary”). Other cartoons noted the exchange rates for cigarettes for onions (“zigaretten fur zweibels?”), German cheese which was rather pungent (“Jerry Cheese”), or the proper distribution of food so that all gained an equal share (“Problem in short division”).

The need for clean clothing, the cleaning of clothing, and fashion of a sort was another part of these cartoons. For the Americans, the leather jackets which at times noted the bomber to which they were assigned were a sign of pride. Other cartoons noted the need to wash clothes, and the temporary lack of pants due to limited clothing or the inventions that help to make clothes clean or dry faster (“automatic washer”; “automatic dryer”).

Due to the potential for punishment, the cartoons dealing with the Germans directly were limited. This does not mean to say that no depictions occurred: there were cartoons which discussed roll call (“No Kriegie Heils”) searches (“The Jerries Search”), and the

sentry with a dog noted in the pet/food section (“Sniffing a Jerry Cheese”). Lastly, the cartoons also noted the issue of medical necessity. Budgen noted that the US doctors were better for inoculations (“The English Way”) as well as how the English doctors conducted operations (“under the knife”) in which the British medical officers seemed to cure all ailments with surgery. The issue of medical treatment was a concern with so many people in proximity, and since medical release and exchanges did occasionally occur, but only if the prisoner was considered no longer medically fit to serve (Anderson and Westmacott 1946, 45).

## A Starting Point for Further Exploration

As with any aspect of history, the records can be found in a variety of places not necessarily presumed. These cartoons, while simple and certainly not complete, at least offer a way for students of history, or even historians to augment other texts or even gain a limited visual history of the PoW camps. There is also at least one book of sketches on American PoWs in the Pacific theatre, but the tone is far more serious. In all, these books offer insight into conditions at the camps, as well as some of the forms of mental escape from the monotony, and even humor into the situation.

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**Cynthia McGinnis**

**Poetry Math**

***Lines According to Pascale's Triangle***

Learn.

Know more.

Seek wisdom now.

Explore, question, grow, share.

We gain knowledge through practice and time.

Read, write, listen, speak.

Think deeply, friend.

Minds evolve.

Change.

Syllable count breakdown following Pascal's Triangle:

1. Learn. (1)
2. Know more. (1 1)
3. Seek wisdom now. (1 2 1)
4. Explore, question, grow, share. (1 3 3 1)
5. We gain knowledge through practice and time. (1 4 6 4 1)
6. Read, write, listen, speak. (1 3 3 1)
7. Think deeply, friend. (1 2 1)
8. Minds evolve. (1 1)
9. Change. (1)

***Celtic Poem***

Whispers  
Soft echoes  
Lingers in moonlight  
Dreams dance  
gently

**Rick Tanney**

***Curriculum Vita***

Within the walls of Academe  
you hear the muse of knowledge scream  
at what we know or think we know  
at what we seem or think we seem  
A resumé or summary  
a page of one's biography  
shows what we know or think we know  
and what we see or think we see  
but lives on paper never grow  
and filled-in forms leave no shadow

**Ayla E. Bonner**

## ***The Savior of Mount Olympus***

I was sixteen when I found out I was special. I wasn't normal like all the other kids; never got the chance to be normal nor did I feel normal. My parents were overbearing my whole life and I finally understood why. I met this girl; a girl like me. Something magical happened that day when we saw each other, like we knew who the other was. I saw her looking at me through the Starbucks window. I was across the street from my high school working on homework when she came into the building and darted my way.

"Elody?" she said. She knew my name; how did she know my name?

"Yeah? That's me, who are you?" She smiled at me with such pride like she just accomplished something.

"This might sound really odd, but I have been looking for you for a long time. I need your help," the random girl said. She had long brown hair stopping at her midback, styled in a very slick, straight ponytail. She looked polished and very put together. Her bright green eyes were looking at me with such anticipation and curiosity.

"Me? You need my help? Who are you?" I spoke. I was so lost in this fast-paced conversation. I didn't think I had ever been so confused in my life. She was staring at me in a hopeful way, it scared me a little bit. I started to think this lady is crazy.

"I am so sorry; my name is Vienna. I do need your help, where I am from, where your parents are from, is falling apart. I think you might be the key to helping my world." Okay, I thought I was lost before but now, now I am LOST.

"What are you talking about, 'your world'? My parents? What?!" This strangely beautiful women looked at me like I had lost my mind, like I should have all the answers and understand what is coming out of her mouth.

"Come with me and we will talk on the way." Vienna says. She grabbed my hand and takes me away.

"Wait, wait, wait, waaait, I am not going with you, I have no clue who you are 'Vienna'," I said making air quotations with my hands.

"Calm down Elody, I know your parents and they know I am here. Everything is okay." Next thing I knew we were halfway to my house. We left in such a hurry I didn't grab any of my belongings.

The last thing I saw was a notification pop up on my phone and seeing a picture of me and my mom at the beach. An overwhelming feeling had come over me, a disconnection from my parents. I constantly asked questions while she was dragging me to my house. How did she know where I lived in the first place? How did she know my parents?

My mom and dad were sitting in the living room when we arrived. My mom was holding something in her hand and that's when I realized that there is another couple sitting across from them. My mom was holding a book and was looking at me not as if she is disappointed in me but in herself. A part of me knew they had been hiding something from me my whole life.

"Elody, these are my parents. They are old friends of your parents, that's how we knew where to find you." Vienna said cautiously.

"Sweetie, there is something we must tell you. You aren't just a normal human; you are a god. A child of those who once lived on Mount Olympus," my mother said. I had no words; I just stared at her like she had gone crazy, and they notice that because Vienna's dad started speaking.

"You are a descendant of the gods, Zeus and Hera. You were chosen a long time ago to be the savior of our world if anything detrimental were to happen. The prophecy says you will collect four artifacts that can save everyone."

"Sadly, that prophecy is coming true, and you must go on this quest to find these artifacts. There has been an awful plague that has spread across Mount Olympus. You will not do this alone; Vienna will come with you," her mother said. While everything is processing in my brain and deciding if these people are crazy or not, my mom handed me the book she had been holding. Its worn-out brown leather feels rough in my hands and has a brown symbol burned into it. Split into four sections, there are various drawings inside. The four works of art must represent the artifacts. I opened it up and there was a gold whirling pool in the middle big enough to fit my hand in.

"That is how you will go to the place that holds the artifacts," my father said. My parents got up and walked over to me. My mom took my hand and wished me luck and my dad gave me a hug. My heart was racing with thought of the near future. I had to up and leave my family and friends to go on some god quest? This sounded ridiculous to me. None of this made any sense and I felt like I was dreaming. However, it felt right, like I was supposed to do this, like this is what I had been searching for deep down, adventure and mystery. A missing piece of me being put back. I started to get filled with excitement and then Vienna's mom started to speak, "you must go now; the quest should not be hard but expect some trials.



The artifacts should find you, they are drawn to you, meant to find you. Good luck, girls.” Vienna came up next to me and held my hand. I stood there frozen staring at my parents, these strangers, how am I supposed to save “their world”? Thoughts were rushing through my head, and I felt dizzy.

“You ready?” she said. I didn’t think I had been more ready for anything in my entire life actually, no matter how crazy that sounded. I looked at my parents, filled with a little anger from them keeping this secret. I then understood it was for my safety, trying to prevent this prophecy from coming to life.

“Yes, I think I am.” I turned to Vienna and opened the book to the first page. Covered in beautiful flowers and greenery. We put our hands in the glowing gold portal and closed our eyes. The next thing I knew was waking up on the ground feeling nauseous. I opened my eyes, and my vision was filled with beautiful green meadows with flowers of every color spilled everywhere. We were surrounded by trees so tall I could have probably seen the curve of the realm at the top of one. The sky was so bright and clear, filled with pinks and purples. Vienna helped me up and we started walking, slowly scanning the area we were trying to see if we could find anything out of the normal. Anything at all, the more I looked the more I didn’t see.

“I think we should head towards the other side of the meadow; something is telling me to go that way.” I said, and she looked at me confused.

“There is nothing over there,” Vienna said, and I just looked at her and smiled.

“I guess we are going to find out.” She smiled back at me, and we started running towards the middle. Bright green leafed trees surrounded us like a border. The closer we got I saw a building start to appear in front of us. We started to slow down, and I looked at her.

“I told you, come on something must be in there. Do you know what the artifacts look like?”

“No, I don’t know but you should feel it when you get close. There is no description of what the artifacts are or how to get them.” Vienna and I went inside this building, it was huge with surrounding white columns. The entrance had a tall opening, no door. It was completely empty inside besides one single pedestal. The walls were a pure white with blue painted art covering them from top to bottom. I held my hand out to indicate to Vienna to stop walking.



"Look" As I pointed around the pedestal. "It's connected by four sections, like the four realms. What if all the artifacts are here? Maybe all they needed was me, sort of like a key to access it."

That seems too easy though, we need to be careful." I looked around the room to see if there were any traps or maybe any other people around, but I saw nothing.

"Well did the prophecy say there would be danger involved? Fights? Battles?"

"Not really, but it said it would be mentally and physically straining for the chosen one, and you my friend are the chosen one." We started to walk closer to the pedestal and in the middle was an indent of a flower with five petals. I paused stricken by shock because the necklace I was wearing is the exact same shape. I had it my whole life and then the memories of my parents telling me to never lose it came together. I took off my necklace and placed it in the indented pedestal. I suddenly felt weightless and realized I was floating in the air and there was a flash of light. I fell hard to the ground, I felt different, I felt strong and... and taller?

"Oh my gosh Elody, you just changed into your true self. Your goddess form, you look astonishing." Vienna said. I could see my reflection on the top of the pedestal. My short brown hair was pinned back by two gold clips. I had on a long green dress that was strapped around one of my shoulders held together by a gold pin in the shape of a circle with the same five petaled flower embedded in it.

"Okay this is actually insa-" There was a large boom and then there were three creatures standing in front of us snarling. They had two horns sticking outside either side of the head and a distorted body of a lion. They were humongous beasts; I scooted away in fear and struggled to stand back up.

"Um Vienna, what are we going to do?"

"Think of a weapon, you should have some sort of powers; you're a descendant of great gods." I thought of what I was told earlier, a descendant of Zeus and Hera. Maybe I could control the weather or create lighting. I threw my arms up above me looking at the sky through the open ceiling and begged for a storm. The sky started to turn an awful dark gray and you could hear loud thunder. I turned to Vienna and smiled; I didn't feel any fear, I felt power. I waved my arms towards one the creatures and a bolt of lightning struck down and shook the floor. As I did so to the others, Vienna is searching the room for any artifacts. After the short fight I felt a little drained.



"Vienna look, the creatures are gone! I did it, wow, I actually did it." I walked over and see three items lying on the ground where the creatures had been. She picked one up, it was a dazzling gold chalice covered in blue and white jewels. I grabbed the next, it was a figurine horse with wings. Lastly there was a shield with a gorgon's head on it. These must be three of the artifacts.

"If these are three of the artifacts the fourth one must be here as well. But where is it?" Vienna said. I started thinking, pacing around the room when it hit me. I walk up to the pedestal and grab my necklace and put it back on.

"I thought the artifacts would be separated between the four realms. This makes no sense." Vienna states.

"I think it was a trick made to scare off the chosen one so they would not try to save this world. My necklace, it must be the fourth artifact, right?" I put the small figurine in my pocket and grabbed the chalice and shield from Vienna. Instantly I felt the nauseous feeling again and I awake in a bright blue and white space.

"Vienna? Vienna where are you?!" What was I supposed to do now, the book was gone, I was all alone, there was nothing around me. I stopped to think, I don't think my necklace was the last artifact. I look down and I see all of Mount Olympus, every beautiful square inch. I watch as the plague vanishes slowly revealing the true wonders of this place. It is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I realized the prophecy was fulfilled, I could feel the peace inside me and in this realm. I was the fourth "artifact," the missing piece to this puzzle. Heartbreak ran through me as I thought of my family and home. Will I ever be able to return home? Is this where I belong? Why I always felt out of place, this is my home, my destiny.

I am the guardian of Mount Olympus now. I spend every day watching over the people and the land. My presence over this realm protects it from the plague, I make sure it will never come back. I am the savior of Mount Olympus and this is where I belong.

**Tara Propper**

***To Muse***

The reader and his tacky  
stuck like faint expectation  
She felt his doctorly, his need  
There was nothing to quell the hermeneutic

There was nothing to keep the stuck  
from his stealing. The book is sick  
with nondisclosure  
and dropping veils, like ladies on bent

legs. There was something in it, though,  
wasn't I?  
There was something like still life,  
wasn't she?

And, the houses, full of her stories, are falling  
like fallen women. Their windows cannot see  
his burnt-out histories, hallowed along each  
negative space. And there you are

behind open doors  
kept gently close  
like nightmare awaiting.  
And there you are

like lines in a movie,  
she could have said:  
The ending is not  
its meaning.



**Anthony Miller**

***A Future Thought***

I know now the reason why we want to be the first to find the child who believes in and accomplishes time travel.

It is to be forever remembered and blessed by the one who achieves this momentous task.

Come to me and visit me. I hope I see and recognize you one day.

Did the machines I built lend a hand or a thought to your momentous achievement?

Did they eliminate the variables in your equation?

Come to me and visit me. I hope I see and recognize you one day.

**Tara Propper**

***Standing Bouquet***

The Easter pedals ascend from their lenten  
caves like pulpy babes. They are not forever  
promises, only seasonal well-wishes.

To deadhead a rose is a kind of surgery.  
There is a disarrangement, a scalpel.  
My gloved hands extracting, riting

each descending pedal. They are as holy ashes  
patterning the kneeling earth. But what of their penance?  
Do the bees hear? And all the slithering creatures

do not understand. But the new buds know to look up  
to find the sun because death gets on everything  
where the light doesn't go.



***The Mouse and The Muse***

(Excerpt from Inner Demons and Divine Purposes)

*Allow me to offer you a glimpse into Trey's mother's backstory, where the veil between the ordinary and the extraordinary is torn asunder. In this passage, our protagonist's mother, at the beginning of her writing career, stands on the precipice of change, teetering between the abyss of her inner demons and the lofty heights of her divine purpose:*

Renée groaned, massaging her temples. She felt like her brain was full of cotton wool. The harder she strained for ideas, the more they escaped. It was like trying to catch fireflies or grasp smoke as it slipped through her fingers. Writing a book was not all it was cracked up to be. It was hard work, whether it was your first, your fifth, or your twentieth. After the book signings and tours and posing for the latest edition of the city newspaper, it was a lot of sitting around, crossing out feeble ideas, and wallowing in imposter syndrome.

She had taken a break, walked around the garden, and down by the river, leaves dried and curled by fall swirling about her ankles. She had even tried meditating on her balcony, inhaling the scent of the forest. But nothing seemed to work. She was stuck, and her editor had called twice already this week asking about the first fifty pages. Renée hadn't even written fifty words.

The sun had set already, and the glow from the screen provided the only light. Renée hadn't bothered getting up to switch on the lamp. A noise made her glance up from her laptop. She gasped and threw herself back in her chair as a mouse scurried across the floor. Frozen, Renée watched as it ran and disappeared through the doorway. Renée's eyes traveled up and caught sight of a woman, half hidden in shadow, standing in silence and watching her.

Renée gave a small scream, clamping her hand over her mouth. No one was supposed to be here but her. Her heart raced, drumming in her breast like a battle drum. Panic flooded her veins. Was it a burglar? Should she call the cops?

The woman didn't move, but simply watched her. There was something... otherworldly about this woman. The stranger's hair was impossibly long, down to her ankles, and she held a youthful beauty that made Renée's frantically beating heart ache. As she stepped towards her, the truth dawned on Renée like a sunrise. This wasn't a mere woman.

It was the Muse.

The legendary inspiration who had been whispered about by artists and writers for centuries. This beautiful woman had appeared before her as if in a dream, smiling a knowing smile, stepping through the half-closed door and furniture as though it wasn't there. A mischievous glint entered her eye. The room crackled with her energy, making the hairs on Renée's arms stand on end as she watched with breathless awe. She didn't know whether to stay where she was or lie prostrate on the floor in a respectful bow.

The Muse reached out a hand, fingers long and delicate, and touched Renée's forehead. The young woman gasped as her room disappeared. Pictures and lights overwhelmed her vision, almost too fast to comprehend. Colors she didn't know the names of, images and sensations she couldn't fathom, emotions she had never before felt.

And clarity. Perfect, flawless inspiration.

The Muse withdrew her hand.

"Thank you," Renée breathed.

Her task, which had seemed so difficult just moments ago, now felt laughably simple. A grin spread on Renée's lips. She pulled her chair to her laptop and typed furiously at her keyboard, wishing she could type fast enough to keep up with her thoughts. Her fingers flew, the clacking of the keys echoing throughout her room. Words, marvelous, wonderful words, poured out of her like a waterfall, filling page after page. Each sentence was more perfect than the last, better than any of her last five polished novels. She laughed aloud, riding the train of inspiration for hours, not caring there was a crick in her back and the dry pang of thirst in her throat. What did that matter when the inspiration she had been seeking now gushed from her every pore, begging to be written, to be immortalized forever?

And the Muse stayed at her side, watching over her. The moon and stars moved across the sky, bringing the hours closer to dawn. Renée had written twenty pages, thirty, forty. The mouse was forgotten. Tears poured down Renée's cheeks. This was the most beautiful book she had ever written.

Whenever she faltered or gave pause, the Muse gently nudged her, leading her onto the next paragraph. Renée didn't have to think. She didn't even have to plan. The ideas came almost too fast to write them all down. Her dialogue was flawless. Her descriptions gorgeous. Her prose perfect.

Morning came and the sun rose, casting slits of orange light through the blinds. Exhaustion fell on Renée and she rubbed her eyes, but she had never been so happy. It was done. Her book was finished.



Triumphant, she typed THE END and turned to thank the Muse, her heroine, the savior who had arrived when Renée had been on the verge of giving up and pulled her gently from the edge of despair.

But she was gone. In her place was the mouse, looking at her with its little nose twitching, its ears turning as though to listen, perhaps startled by the sudden lack of clacking laptop keys. Its little black eyes held the intelligence of something greater.

Renée smiled at the little creature. It turned tail and scampered across the laminate floor of Renée's room. Then it disappeared into a shadowy corner.

The Muse had come to Renée that night, to inspire her and push her to reach new heights. Almost nobody in the world could boast a visit from a goddess of art. She leaned back in her seat as her spine popped and stretched her arms over her head. Her bladder was full and her stomach already groaned for breakfast, but she didn't care.

This was the best thing she had ever written. She had written over thirty thousand words in a single night. Surely, it was some kind of record. Her editor would be pleased.

The Muse had come to her, and she had answered the call.



**Roy E. Miller**

***Look Up from Your Screen***

I remember a time that was not so long ago.

If we wanted to meet a friend, outside we had to go.

We would all come together after school, at the local playground.

Where our imaginations could flourish, that was a beautiful sound.

Nowadays people make friends, without having to leave their house.

They even order the family dinner, with only the click of a mouse.

The world has become so complicated, with all the technological advances.

Everyone walks around today, as though they are all in trances.

Looking down at their tablets, more often it is their phone.

For if it wasn't for social media, many people would be alone.

There is so much more to see, outside of the web that is worldwide.

So I challenge you to be brave, get up from your perch and go outside.

Our world is so amazing, and offers so much to be seen.

If you would only take a moment, and just "Look up from your screen."



**Roy E. Miller**

***No Guarantee of a Tomorrow***

When you wake in the morning, and crawl from your bed.

Think to yourself, "Today I will only look ahead."

While you stand in front of the mirror and do what you do.

Say to your reflection, "Hey, I really do like you."

Try to start your day with a smile, people will surely see.

Some may even give one back, you've now given their world some glee.

As you walk down the street and pass a friend or someone you love.

Offer to one your hand to shake, to the other both arms to hug.

If there is something that you desire, go for it, don't be scared.

Because if you wait too long, opportunity may no longer be there.

Enjoy what you possess in life, don't dwell over the things you can't have.

What is yours will make you happy, what is not will only make you sad.

Always fill your todays with happiness, try to avoid the sorrow.

Enjoy what you have right now, for there is no guarantee of a tomorrow.

Tristan Graney

### *The Ballot or the Breaking Point*

My sunken eyes betray my masked intentions. For centuries, I have been the lighthouse beam toward which weary travelers row in hopes of landing on the mythic shores of freedom. Today, I am both the vestige of an unreckoned past and the promise of hope tomorrow. The great American noir is a compilation of my most prolific puppeteers: jesters who dance for the masses. Their theatrics wow the crowds of onlookers as they boast of my might, my ability to retain the good in us and expunge the evil. Their voices boom in the declaration of my relatability. I am for the working man, the calloused tradesman whose sweat-soaked collar yellows under the July heat. I am for the vagabond, a few quarters shy of coming and going to where he's supposed to be. And I am for the disillusioned cynic for whom the American dream has always been a mirage— a beautiful cruelty that torments destined aspirations.

"Yes, I see you!"

"And you!"

"And you there in the back!"

Oh, they choreograph assiduously. They dance and gloat and turn the pages while glossing over the fine print. The crowds cheer for the victories and lament the losses predictably, unified in glory and divided in defeat. They rally around traces of shared identities, fragments that cast shadows over their senses of self and reveal the chaos that somehow evades the mirror. There is always finality, yet rarely resolution.

But there is an even darker underbelly to my heritage, a truth, rather a stain, that blots the still-wet ink of my forefathers' quills. I have never been what I claim to be. I am a melange of hypocrisy, daydreams, nightmares, and failed attempts to move away from aristocracy. I am the unnamed memories that planted seeds of what could have been, what should have been, all the while never reconciling or imagining what I might have been. Even as a nascent idea that all might exercise me equally, I was yet still an unproven theory drowning in the constraints that formed me consciously. Regardless of contained progress, I am still not embraced universally. Half of my people know me, and many who do only recognize my face with apathy. Most of those who use me are not excited about my possibilities. It must be that they truly do not realize their agency, right? I am the deciding vote in a contentious group of three, the loathed short straw that hides in plain sight.

"I hear you!"

"And you!"

"And even you, silent in the corner!"

Cheers from the crowd drown out the whispers of dissent, reminding the dodgers they have been conscripted into my embracement. It is simply un-American to balk at my design, the process by which my core comes into being. Who is inscribed into my lines is democracy at its finest! Surely, these are the best of us. These are the sacrificial lambs to a most unglamorous servitude, upon whose backs the yokes of the tired dependents weigh heavily. They cannot profit from such bondage to the plights of our most vulnerable, our most desperate to jump ship and swim fervently to the imagined shores. No, they are indebted to a national promise of the oneness from which I was born.

"We are all in this together!"

"We are all together!"

"We are in this!"

The travelers row towards the bellowing proclamations of the jesters. Their arms are weak from digging deeper into the waves that drive into them, and currents of doubt swirl around their oars. These invisible hands seemingly grab hold of the boat, violently shaking the rowers from any semblance of safety. They are treading dangerous waters, witnesses to their own impending doom.

"You can do it!"

"Can't you imagine land?"

"You're not swimming hard enough!"

The travelers are struggling to stay afloat even though they have spent years drowning above water. They are paddling towards a tomorrow that never came, a dream just a few more sleeps away. I am the amalgamation of your best intentions and worst outcomes, and vice versa. I am the scattered ashes of a phoenix America; one that is reborn in new generations before they can see the remnants of the old. Hope swims faster than disillusionment, though I fear I am caught in the middle of the two.

**Joanna Grant**

***American Sonnet: Sometimes, Overseas***

An unmarried Western woman, working overseas--  
I often get asked, "Where is your husband?"  
"How many babies?" After explaining  
one time too many that I've never been married,  
never had any babies, not really likely to now,  
and no, I don't think I've wasted my life,  
not all of it anyway (thanks, airport taxi driver),  
I find myself lying, saying things like, "I was widowed.  
So young. I'm afraid he got taken before we could conceive."  
That usually does the job--the subject gets changed.  
Once the driver turned off the meter, my whole fare got waived  
sometimes the asker tears up and sometimes sometimes  
when I tell it just right I get tears in my eyes too  
and I wonder oh I wonder which one of us deserved them the most

***American Sonnet: Valentine's Day, 2024***

This year, it falls on Ash Wednesday. The day of love, the day of death. Grey smears  
And roses. Today a dear friend let the cremains of his dead lover scatter over the waters  
off the coast of Maunaloa, the water, the sky impossibly blue, the ashes bobbing  
for a time in the wake of their double canoe, the video posted for us to see, to remember.  
What was left of the dead lover wrapped in a leaf, held lovingly in her soft lap by his mother.  
Another dear friend posted online a picture of a man I don't know, have never met,  
but who meant the world to my friend, who spoke of the man in the photograph's death--

Some days some weeks some months some years after years without end it feels  
Like my heart the land the water the sky the very rainclouds ache, sore to the touch,  
So many grey-purple yellowing bruises, every oil stain, every sunset, every puddle.  
But today a strange barefoot girl told me out of the blue that I was so beautiful and a man  
I know only a little handed me a white flower plucked from a discounted bouquet and I've had  
better Valentine's Days but I've also had worse (and things can always be so, so much worse)  
and that white rose, even secondhand, still smells so softly, so quietly sweet: air after a storm.

**Joanna Grant**

***Sonnet for Mary Shelley: Percy Bysshe's Heart***

The moment she saw him, she wanted his heart,  
Never mind that he was sworn to another.  
She believed in love over all, just like her mother.  
Death in childbirth? Bad luck. For her part

She just knew things for them would be different.  
Make your own laws, speak your own truth. What other  
Law than that? It happened. She gave herself over,  
Body and soul, there, by her mother's grave marker.

But then—the years of babies dying, dying, dying.  
His beloved eye roaming, roving, restless. Yes, he'd return,  
But always later, later in the coming. Then the drowning,

The burning on the beach. It took another humiliating fight  
Over scraps of cloth, bits of bone filched from the urn,  
But now she's got it. The heart. In a drawer. Locked up tight.

***The Remote***

I became a Sicilian in 1985, though not officially but in the heart—

Many of us American Air Force members were housed in Hotel La Pineta in Chiaramonte Gulfi, a short distance from the base, by bus. The hotel sat on a high precipice over-looking the valley floor below. Each morning a shepherd could be seen traversing the stones with about 15 head of sheep, as best I could count. You could barely hear them baaing back and forth, surely sweating in the heat with all of that wool. Actually, it was April when I arrived, and so I am sure the sheep weren't so miserable as I was, Tunisia in North Africa being so close, I was sure each wind that blew was sirocco. They said you could stand at a certain vantage point in Sicily and see the lights of Tunisia at night. People were saying lots of things. There were supposedly nothing but nuders residing at Club Med close by. We were all on remote duty and at the mercy of buses, so I am not sure who found time after work to confirm such possibilities. I guess those who desired knowing would know, and the others would drink red wine on the balcony overlooking the precipice with all of our precious leftover time. These were only my initial thoughts.

I usually had dinner in the dining room with all of the other servicemembers, usually heavy pasta with cream and ham, before taking a stroll along the road that led upward further into the mountains there close by. I found the small caves quite interesting, painted up in graffiti, usually lovers proclaiming their devotion to each other. Many lovers had frequented most of the cavernous openings from what I could see. I did not dare poke my head in, as they were slightly more elevated than the road and a little spooky, in truth, but I enjoyed looking at them, affording them the respect they deserved as hang outs for the local lovers. Sometimes these lovers were cats, and this is where I learned the mating call of the common housecats, which I share with my high schoolers to this day. They love my crazy stories, though I could never truly explain to them how very life-changing such a place could be for a smalltown North Florida boy. Like in North Florida, my Alabama students like a good laugh, even though it does draw a bit of ridicule. For a while, I would always get the request to make that sound "one more time." I really had it down. It would be near impossible to scratch down the utterances involved in such an exchange, as it is guttural, sort of like a medieval yawl. I love to make people laugh, so for a while I would release the sounds of cat love. Even my house cat, Mr. Mahoney, still seems to get a laugh from it. He runs from wherever he may be in the house to check out the disturbance, and he then tries to create his own neutered version of the jowling.

One day in my first week in Sicily, I remember well, I was walking the mountain roads and came across the very shepherd seen each morning. It was afternoon rather, so the space of land his sheep were going toward was probably there along the narrow stretch of roadway, which looked partially impermanent, a lot like the lime rock roads of North Florida. Though instead of oak trees, there were very old olive trees.

The young man seemed withdrawn, or private. Being a yacker, I tried out some demotic Italian. Not to try and match his own colloquial tongue, but because I could do no other speech than the simplest that could possibly be mustered. We were taking classes on the base with a young woman who had to put up with teaching hard-headed servicemembers too tired and hungry to listen most afternoons, and I was way behind in the class. At the time, a second language was a mere impossibility in my mind. Anyway, the young man was probably confused by my attempt and so kept on walking, and the look he gave was not angry nor happy but sort of in between, a lot like my rancher grandfather who had three hundred head of cattle, after selling his fruit orchard in the Sawgrass area of Broward County, FL in the late 50s, to move up north a little. The influx of the citizenry into South Florida, once the interstates and canals were set in their places, caused him to choose a new occupation. He had no time for smiles and conversations.

I turned and watched the fluidity the shepherd used to direct his flock. They knew his voice and even his movements so well, I could not help but feel a little jealous, and very excited about the new feelings and experiences and friends I would certainly have here in this beautiful place called Sicilia.



**Nicole Malyj Daone**

***Flesh, fleshy***

See clean plate club

See grandma, anxious, says eat, eat something

See famine

See war

See survival

See relationship; genetics

See my full, round stomach

See food as nourishment

i.e. numbing i.e. nurturing i.e. celebrating

See love

See happiness in the streams of liquid butter  
where pierogi and onions swim



*Dream Paths*

My Ukrainian grandparents bought the American Dream with nothing in their pockets. They made a whole new life on foreign soil, assimilating, burying their pasts. Got day jobs at 7-Up, cleaned office buildings at night, put their kids in public schools and told them to learn English. Only inside the home could the tongue of the Motherland be spoken, but their grandchildren would never learn the meaning of its language cadence beyond pleasantries and Holy Ghost Byzantine hymns. A brand-new house and a brand-new car, a compact electric oven instead of a hand painted ceramic *pich*, strings of faux pearls replaced rolled red clay beads. Patterned store-bought dresses filled closets instead of embroidered *vyshyvanka*, heated curlers were head adornments for styled celebrations, not the flower and ribbon *vinok*.

Two-room, wattle and daub, thatched roof shacks; memories of famine, war, and fear were left an ocean behind. Of all they suffered, they would never speak. Every untold memory and story is sealed inside the soil of a Catholic cemetery. I have the life my grandparents wanted for me:

My American pockets are full—yet.

No one ever asked about the path of my dreams, the dreams I have to hold my grandpa's hand as we drift through a sunflower garden together, dreams where I watch grandma and grandpa leap with unbroken hands across an autumn fire pit, dreams of grandpa weaving me a blanket of his survival stories, the dreams where I am on fertile Motherland soil, vibrations of language shaking loose my soul, my full heart singing, *vinok* ribbons fluttering in the breeze as I dance the *hopak* under the light of a thousand opaque stars.

**Arunima A. Vasudevan**

***Blown Out***

When the power goes out at night,  
there is hustle and bustle at first  
before everyone can settle  
around a flickering light in the kitchen.

We are relieved of homework  
but Amma still cooks  
in the light of a kerosene lamp.  
We have our dinner  
chewing the mishaps over  
one by one.

Once our tummies are full  
We start singing,  
telling stories and philosophising.

And then,  
Our World is so small and beautiful  
in the shimmering light.  
Even the shadows on the walls  
get mischievous with us.  
There is "us" with "us."

Deep silence, murmurs,  
wild laughter, hums, gasps,  
sighs, smiles ....

How dare the power come back on,  
without our permission  
with the brightness piercing  
our eyes, our small world,  
our tiny happiness!!!!!!  
It is a pity that there is no choice  
but to blow the lamp out.



## Contributors

**Ayla Bonner** lived in Kansas her whole life and her interest in writing started at a young age. She started writing short stories/poems in high school and even tried to start writing a book. Ayla is a student at UMGC while also being active duty in the Army. She is a wheeled vehicle mechanic and working towards her bachelor's degree in business. Ayla is currently stationed overseas, which has made it harder for her to focus on school and her writing. Nonetheless she still tries to focus on her future career and what she can create with her writing.

**Ron Breines** is the author of two collections of poetry, two novels, was the librettist and composer of the off-Broadway musical production *The Winds of Change* performed in New York, wrote the poetic narration for *Saint Saen's Carnival of the Animals* performed and recorded by concert pianist Edmund Arkus, and composed the music for Richard Schotter's play *Taking Stock*. He produced, wrote, and performed on his own album *Under the Waterline* with his seven-piece ensemble, is the author of six dramatic plays performed in New York, Los Angeles, Texas, and Israel, and is currently collaborating on a poetic video series while completing an epic poem titled *Los Conquistadors*. Ron is a professor of literature, creative writing, and theater at UMGC in Okinawa, Japan.

**Jill Carey** resides in Germany, where she works as a senior program coordinator and National Test Center subject matter expert for University of Maryland Global Campus. She is also an adjunct faculty member teaching college students who are active-duty U.S. military personnel, veterans, and their families stationed at the U.S. military bases in Grafenwoehr and Vilseck, Germany. Jill holds a Master of Business Administration from UMGC and is currently working toward a master's degree in human resource management. She has been writing poetry for over 20 years.

**Nicole Malyj Daone** is a military spouse and mother of two who enjoys editing her unpublished historical fiction manuscript and writing poetry while living in coastal Virginia. Bits of memoir and stories about World War II, Ukraine, and poems of motherhood and childhood float in her head, purse, or random notebooks. When not writing or learning about writing, she teaches and practices yoga, leads fitness classes for prenatal and postpartum clients, meanders in nature, cooks without recipes, searches for animals to feed or pet, and researches until falling happily into a rabbit hole of contemplation and inevitable composition inspiration.

**Srimayee Gangopadhyay** (she/her) is 25 years old. She started writing poems at the age of 11 while searching for enigma in the ordinary and as a mechanism to uncover her introverted self. Her poems have appeared in various anthologies of *The Poet Magazine* and *WinC* magazine, and she writes film and poetry criticism on various platforms.

**Marcus Gradney** has over 16 years of service to the Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMCC) and has served as an assistant pastor, contributing to the growth of a local church. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) and is currently pursuing an MBA while studying AI. As a member of the Sembach planning committee, Marcus helped organize several events, including the Summer Block Party. With a passion for public speaking since age 11, he has developed skills in writing, producing, and hosting video content focused on emotional healing and spreading a message of peace.

**Tristan Graney** is a PhD candidate specializing in rhetoric and composition, with a focus on cultural and political rhetorics. His research explores the intersections between music, rhetoric, and identity-making in sociocultural contexts, examining how music and political discourse shape public understanding and historical narratives. He is particularly interested in how rhetoric constructs and communicates identity, both individually and collectively. His work includes presentations and publications on music's role in shaping cultural and political rhetoric, as well as its potential as a storytelling medium with interdisciplinary reach.

**Joanna Grant** holds a Ph.D. in British and American literature, specializing in fictional as well as nonfiction travel narratives of the Middle East. She spent eight years in that region, notably two years in Afghanistan, teaching writing, mythology, and public speaking classes to American soldiers and gathering materials for her own memoir, which she is currently completing as part of an MFA in Creative Nonfiction at Southern New Hampshire University under the direction of Mark Sundeen. Her poetry and prose have appeared widely in journals including *Guernica* and *Prairie Schooner*. Her most recent poetry collection is *Adrift* from Alien Buddha Press. Joanna has been a Best New Poet, Best of the Net, and Pushcart nominee.

**Md Mozaffor Hossain** was born in Bangladesh on December 18, 1985. He studied English at Rajshahi University, Bangladesh. Before he came to the U.S. to study for a master's degree in English language and literature at North Dakota State University, he had been teaching English at Pundra University of Science and Technology. He loves to write poems on the profound realizations of everyday things of life. He says his wife, Mst Ashrafun Nahar Begum, is the inspiration for his poetic pursuit.

**Malcolm Magee** is a writer in the UMGC Europe community. He has previously published works of history and fiction. He believes that the world is filled with savage beauty, that chaos can dance with order, that joy and sorrow are companions in a well-lived life, and that the only way to avoid pain is to love nothing — and that is not a life well lived. He wishes every pilgrim soul a fulfilling journey from where they are to their final port with all the joy, pain, love, and regret that make life fully human.

**Cynthia McGinnis** is a professor of mathematics at University of Maryland Global Campus, blending mathematics, computer science, and the arts. With a diverse background in art, music, and dance, Cynthia specializes in visual mathematics. Her digital design "Fibonacci Mod 4" was presented at the Bridges International Conference on Mathematics and Art in 2012 and featured in the Taylor & Francis *Journal of Mathematics and the Arts*. Cynthia's latest work, "Symphony of Transformations: A Visual Exploration of 3D Rotations in Mathematical Functions," created for her calculus students, was accepted for the 2024 Bridges Conference in Richmond, Virginia. As a digital artist, she continues to explore the intersection of numbers, patterns, and creative expression, inspiring students and art enthusiasts.

**Mark McMichael** is an active-duty U.S. Navy service member of 16 years. He lives in Jacksonville, Florida with his wife and 3.5 kids. He has written six books and self-published them on Amazon. He's also helped produce two charity anthologies for cats with Pen and Paw International. His work has seen him recognized by the University System of Maryland Board of Regents with the 2023 Board of Regents Student Excellence Scholarship for Innovation and Creativity. He completed his Associate Degree in General Studies in December 2023 and has moved on to his bachelor's degree in English with a minor in criminal justice.

**Anthony Miller** is an active grandfather and a veteran of the United States Army, the Indiana National Guard, and the U.S. Navy. A University of Maryland Global Campus Europe student, he is now studying for a master's degree. Anthony finds that being a grandfather is the best work and currently enjoys that work above all. He is passionate about building a healthy world for our children to live in.

**Roy E. Miller** retired in 2007 from the U.S. Army with 23 years of service. He worked briefly in retail but was not satisfied, so in 2011, he began working with University of Maryland Global Campus Europe in order to continue supporting our troops. His writing inspiration comes from personal and professional life experiences. Most of his inspirations come as he enjoys the atmosphere of a local bar in Heidelberg, Germany. He resides in Heidelberg with his wife and their dog Teddy. As many people do, Roy has dreams, hopes, and ambitions for the future but lives for today.

**Eva Pagoulatos** was born in the U.S. and raised in Greece. She completed her undergraduate degree in psychology at the American College of Greece and then received her doctorate from Albizu University in Miami, Florida. She has been teaching for over a decade, allowing her to expand the minds of her students and receive fresh insights and perspectives from them. Psychology has always been her passion, as she strongly believes in the mind-body connection. She has had the good fortune of working with diverse populations in a variety of contexts. She is also a licensed clinical psychologist, specializing in conducting psychological and psychoeducational evaluations with children and adolescents, which she enjoys immensely. She is a book worm, coffee lover, and travel enthusiast.

**Myles Pressley**, also known as Rtizan, is a young up and coming storyteller from Columbia, South Carolina. While Myles was from a small town, his grandfather's name spoke volumes down there. Philip Simmons, Myles's great grandfather, was a famous blacksmith in Charleston and was well known for his ironwork all throughout the city. With that history in Myles's blood, he felt he was meant to be a creator, but his creations would manifest themselves in a different way. While his great grandfather was an artisan with hammer, Myles was gifted with a pen. Not simply a songwriter, a screenwriter, or a novelist, Myles dabbles in multiple forms of artistry to share his life's story and express the inner child imagination he's held since the age of 12.

**Tara Propper** has earned her MFA in poetry and PhD in English. She is the author of a collection of poetry, entitled *This body was never made* (Finishing Line Press). Her poetry has appeared in the *Southampton Review*, *Janus Unbound*, *Literature Today*, *Ekstasis Magazine*, *Shuili Magazine*, *Impost: A Journal of Creative and Critical Work*, *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, *Moveable Type*, *Vagabond City Press*, and *P – Queue*. She is currently an assistant professor of English in the Department of Literature and Languages at the University of Texas at Tyler.

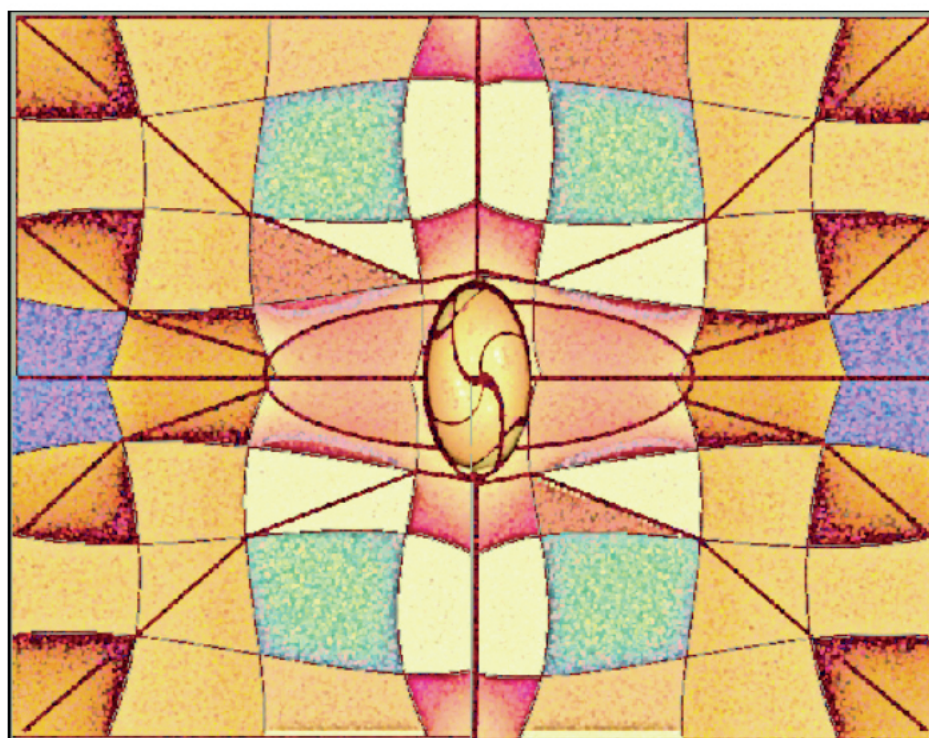
**Timothy Quezada** developed a deep interest in poetry from a young age. This passion wasn't focused on reading, but on expressing emotions through writing. For him, poetry is a cathartic process, allowing the release of feelings and life's challenges by putting them on paper. It remains a personal and private pursuit, rarely shared, yet essential for processing experiences in a meaningful way. Through this distillation of emotions into words, he hopes his reflections resonate with others. Timothy is the assistant vice president of faculty affairs at University of Maryland Global Campus Europe.

**Cord A. Scott** teaches history, government, art history (film and graphic arts) and humanities. He has been with UMGC since 2015. Dr. Scott has a background in 20th – century U.S. history with an emphasis in cultural, political, and military history, from Loyola University Chicago, where he completed his PhD. He has an MA from Baylor University in Waco, Texas with an emphasis in international relations, particularly Middle East studies. He has a BA in history from Minot State University in Minot, North Dakota. He has published three books (*Comics and Conflict*, *Four Colour Combat*, and *The Mud and the Mirth: Marine Cartoons from WWI*) and numerous articles for a variety of academic journals as well as general publications within Asia.

**John (Johnny) Shelly Summerfield Jr.** has been teaching at UMGC (and formerly UMUC) for 7 years while stationed in Europe during the 1980s and 90s. He has an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College and a BA in English from University of Florida. Originally from Live Oak, FL, his muse is the Suwannee River. He's been married for 37 years to Dr. Giovanna Summerfield (née Spampinato, of Italy), a professor at Auburn University. They have three children – Alessio (a television production manager), Ylenia (a trauma therapist), and Sabrina (a software engineer). John has had many poems and stories published. He is also publisher and chief editor of New Plains Press, Auburn, Alabama.

**Rick Tanney** a 1990 graduate of UMGC, is an associate professor who teaches, philosophy, computer science and information management. While an English major at the Ohio State University Mansfield Branch, he won first place in the Sarah E. B. Adams sonnet competition twice (1967 – and '68) and non-sonnet competition (1968), the work being published in *Sonneteers*. While on active duty in the U.S. Army and stationed in Natick, Massachusetts, he was invited by the local arts center to lead poetry workshops. He self-published *RE: Verse #1* in 1977. In the 1980s, his work was published in the local Kaiserslautern military community paper. He teaches in Okinawa, but his home is in Trescott Township, Maine.

**Arunima A. Vasudevan** is a PhD research scholar in the department of English Literature at English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. She is a budding bilingual writer, born and raised in Palakkad, Kerala. She earned her MA in English from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is interested in music and dance in addition to writing and she is passionate about teaching and aspires to contribute to academia. Her research interests include cognitive humanities, medical humanities, and life writing.



**Cynthia McGinnis**

### **September Sunset**

*September Sunset* blends mathematics and art to celebrate the hidden artistry in mathematics. At its heart lies a magic square—a numerical grid where every row, column, and diagonal sum to the same number. The magic square is derived from a September birthday, giving the piece personal significance. Each number is assigned a specific hue, transforming a mathematical construct into a vibrant palette. Employing the mathematics of symmetry and fundamental design elements, the artist transforms the numerical foundation into a visual composition. Through a series of vertical and horizontal reflections, art bridges the worlds of logic and creativity. The result is a piece that showcases the beauty of mathematical patterns and demonstrates how they can be shaped into visual art.

#### *September Sunset Magic Square*

$$\begin{array}{r}
 8 \mid 1 \mid 6 \\
 \hline
 3 \mid 5 \mid 7 \\
 \hline
 4 \mid 9 \mid 2
 \end{array}$$



